

The Resurrection  
By Kelly Swartzlander, 1997

People ask, but they don't want to pry. They don't want to bring up what they think may have been the worst experience of my life. They wonder if their prayers made a difference, and I can tell you that they did. They want to know about the miracle, and to hear the story of what happened and judge for themselves whether or not miracles really do still happen, but they don't want me to feel uncomfortable so few people ask. Believe it or not in total it was not the worst experience of my life, but my salvation. I stood looking at the face of death, and turned back to the world with light in my eyes for I saw the face of God in my daughter, in my mind, and in all of you. I give this story to you, my family, and thank you for your part in my daughter's resurrection. I also thank the many who prayed for my daughter that I never met, and we thank you for your prayers because they did make a difference. This story is also for those who have prayed for others and wonder if anyone is listening. Whether you see the effects of your prayers or not doesn't matter, they always help. All expressions of love are maximal and are received and never lost. This is a story that should not go untold because it really happened, and it wasn't two thousand years ago. It didn't happen to some other person, but it happened to me.

A few years before my daughter Lara drowned I was very unhappy. I was in my early twenties and for the first time in my life I had everything I could ever want, and on the outside my life appeared to be fine. Yet, somehow, I found the normal day- to-day irritations and frustrations of life to be unbearable. My level of discomfort was overwhelming because I was still holding on to years of resentments that weighed me down. I also had a deep yearning for answers to deep questions that seemed to be unanswerable, and that kept me unfulfilled. I found it intolerable. I was tired of feeling pain, of any kind, and for any reason. I wanted peace more than I wanted to breathe, and this was when I began studying *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM). The goal of the course is peace, but I also received a biblical type miracle. It is a channeled work from Jesus, and is supposed to be him speaking directly to anyone who will listen. All that really matters is that it was a tool to help me see beyond the ordinary, to find humanity in the inhumane, and to feel love in the midst of fear.

When I was young I remember my mother and how she used to sit in her room reading thirty books at a time. Her bed had no frame and was just a mattress on the floor which was always surrounded with books on various spiritual topics; her bed was the castle inside a moat of books. The books had multiple earmarks, or the books were turned down to keep track of which page she read last. I actually

hated to read most of my life because I hated books for taking up so much of my mother's time that I wanted to spend with her. She was obsessed with "The Truth", the one answer to all questions. As her daughter I soon found her quest for the truth mysteriously passed on to me. My mother and I never talked about make-up or boys. We did not have the usual mother/daughter relationship. She never restricted or punished me. I didn't have a curfew, and she didn't give me advice or tell me what to do, how to live or what to think. She trusted me and treated me as her equal, and we grew up together as friends. She would tell me about all the things she was reading such as her studies on Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, New Age Studies, and all the different religions of the world. We would talk about what we liked and what rung true for us, and what we thought was bull.

My mother, Betty O'Brien, took us to Unity churches that didn't idolize Jesus as the one and only Son of God, but believed "The Christ" was alive and well in all of us. She gave us the greatest and truest sense of identity; she taught us who we were, at least that's what she taught me, just like Jesus tried to do. In her humorous way I remember one afternoon she asked me in one of our debates, "Who do you think you are? Do you think God made Jesus his one beloved son, and the rest of us sinning dirt-bags?" Hmm. Yes, my Mom, what a way with words! Tact was never her way (which I inherited) as she just let it all hang out there honest and to the point. We were the only white kids in our neighborhood with black friends, and when her parents would make racist comments she would pull us to the side when they were out of earshot and tell us why those comments were ignorant, but how we should respect and love our grandparents as they were. Some of Mom's friends were gay when gay was taboo and wrong, and they would come over on weekends or just to laugh with us over dinner. She lived the words of Jesus through her acceptance and love for everyone. She never taught us to hate the sin and love the sinner, because she never taught us to hate. Our house was always short of money but full of love. She was true and fair and brilliant in her understanding and grasp of what mattered.

I'll always remember one particular moment we sat together on our porch swing in New Port Richey, Florida and she read a passage out of the bible to me. It was a sunny morning and she was quoting something Jesus had said, "All these things I can do, ye can do, and even greater things." The words exploded in my mind as I understood their meaning. I believed Jesus was telling the truth and that if he could perform miracles, and told me I could too, then he must not be lying. I was in eighth grade and that passage has never left my heart. That moment and the realization of those words awaken in me daily, and I still feel my mother by my side even though she passed away in 1995. Since I was in eighth grade, from that moment on the porch swing, until the present - all of my conscious life - I have had this kind of obsession and fascination with healing; it's possibilities, how it would

happen, how I could accomplish the tasks that Jesus did. There were times when I knew I was pursuing the quest of being a healer wrongly and would fantasize about the fame and specialness that would be granted to me by being able to accomplish what very few have been able to do throughout history. But when I wasn't thinking about the egocentric parts of healing the realness of healing was thinking about me. There was something else there, something more than my own dreams and wonderment. Healing has been a calling that beckons to my spirit, that whispers to me when I am quiet, and that sits patiently by my side as I pursue other interests and concerns until I turn to it again with my full attention, my energy and my love. It is what fills the quiet part of myself that no one knows, that sings me to sleep and gently nudges me awake in the morning before all the chaotic thoughts of the world settle on my mind like a heavy wool blanket. It is the shadow that hovers just below my busy life. A life where children need to be fed, work, laundry, dishes, dinner, and homework are just the beginning of an endless array of tasks that need to be completed. Each little task becomes oh so important to accomplish that I end up trading in a whole day of my life just to complete them only to start all over again. As time passes I'm starting to feel healing isn't just in the background, it's in the foreground too, it's all about and within me, everywhere present and I can't nor would I want to escape dancing with it.

In all of Mom's studying the one thing she could not tolerate was any concept or interpretation that made God cruel or unloving. God was not a punisher, not a war-wager, nor a condemner. It is the one concept I wanted to believe, but had a problem with as I saw so much suffering. I blamed God for the misery that seemed to be a part of life at times, and was sure that God had caused it for some wrong others or myself had committed. I always believed everything happened for a reason and that surely all the suffering of the world must be God's will on some level, or else it wouldn't exist. It must have a reason. It must have a purpose. I was sure some prayers were left unanswered because God was teaching someone a lesson, but what a sad lesson it must be, a lesson that there is no comfort when we need it most. I was sure that as much as God was supposed to love me there was a part of him that was cruel, and hated me and would turn his back on me in my time of need. If hell were real then God would be content to grind my bones to dust and let me rot there if I was a bad little girl and colored outside the lines. At least that's what all the other churches told me, but my mother guided me away from that. She encouraged me to think for myself. And now after years of intensive study, practice and actual experiences and interactions with the divine I know we are not left comfortless. There are so many different religions in the world, so many "truths", so many ways that God reaches out to each of us individually to touch us, so many different voices, but they all say the same thing. Each of us learns in our own way, we all hear a voice that we hope will guide us, will inspire us, and deliver us from our hellish thoughts. One day I decided to listen and this is the story of what that voice told me.

It was Sunday afternoon, March 12<sup>th</sup>, 1995, exactly one month after my Mom passed away. Before Lara drowned I was intensely studying ACIM, praying, teaching Sunday school and doing everything I could to make sense of the world around me. I heard the saying “teach what you want to learn” so I put myself in situations where I was forced to teach. That Sunday the inner city kids that I was teaching (that were teaching me) were asking questions about the Oklahoma bomber. I loved my kids because they were tough and their ages ranged between 7 and 14 years old. Some came to church (Unity Church in Miami, Florida) without their parents just to get off the streets of Miami for an hour because they could get free food. They asked tough questions about drugs and robbery and sex and no subject was off limits for them, and I excitedly allowed it all. They would not stand for the usual Christian answers that it was all “God’s will”, and good will come out of it and let’s just look at what’s beautiful and lovely and focus on the afterlife. If I told them it was “God’s will” that when they left in an hour and had to go home to their crack-smoking father who was going to beat them then they would surely think God was cruel and so would I. They helped me find the answers to their questions because they were *my* questions! I couldn’t give them the standard answers that I myself did not believe, and so I had to reach for new answers, new hope that gave me peace, and that I could share with them. They helped me look right at them, right at the harsh reality of life for so many people, and myself at the time, and to see something else there. I saw something beautiful, something that makes sense, to “resist not evil” as the bible tells us, and still see love. One of my favorite sayings now is on a magnet in my kitchen, it says “Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but the calm within it.” They helped me find that place. That day they taught me a different definition of what perfection is; not the way things should be, but the way things are.

I left my Sunday school class that afternoon and went home exhausted as I always did on Sundays. Saturday nights I would work until 5 am bartending, and would come home with only enough time to prepare a lesson for Sunday school, get ready to go and head off for church. My husband Mike was out of work and I had been supporting the family for some time on my meager salary. I was exhausted from having no sleep all night and was trying to take a nap. Mike took the kids outside to play because they were making noise and I could not sleep with them running around inside. I finally drifted off...

I awoke to the sound of my 4 year old son Sean screaming at the top of his lungs. He came bursting through my bedroom door and I immediately became enraged and sat up to begin yelling at him for waking me up. The words that came out of his mouth set a fire under my sleeping ass...“Lara fell in the pool and Daddy’s out...!!!...” I didn’t even hear the rest. With adrenaline pumping I jumped up, flew down the stairs skipping three steps at a time, barreled against the front door

full force while trying to turn the knob at the same time and yanked the door knob right out of it's socket. I fumbled helplessly to put the knob back in the door so I could open it. I looked down at my trembling hands and felt like I was watching one of those cheesy horror flicks where the lady can't get her keys in the door to get away from the monster. I couldn't get the door knob in the hole because my hands were shaking so badly. I banged and kicked the door and screamed in frustration. I looked down at the knob and whimpered because I couldn't get out to save my baby! It's so bizarre how time stops when something like this happens, and everything was happening in slow motion. Those three seconds of time seemed endless as I envisioned myself diving to the bottom of the pool in my nightshirt to save my daughter, if I could only get out of the house! I ran around to the side door, flung it open, and ran as fast as I could to our community pool that was only 40 feet from our front door.

I reached the pool area and stopped immediately staring in horror. To my right my husband Mike and a neighbor were bent over Lara. All I could see was Lara's little baby legs sticking out from under them as I slowly walked towards them with my hands covering my mouth. I looked with disbelief as I chanted the same words over and over again, "Oh my God, oh dear God, oh dear God, oh my God, oh dear God." There was my precious little girl, blue, dead, and not breathing as they tried to resuscitate her. Another neighbor was calling 911. I stood there helpless and in shock. She made a gurgling sound. It was the sound of water moving when they tried to blow into her mouth, it sounded like she was under water. She lay there lifeless, an occasional gurgle but never a breath. "Give her to me", I said. I cradled her in my arms and took her down by the curb to wait for the ambulance. She was trying to breathe; only two or three gurgles per minute was all I could hear. I didn't even know how she was doing that as the noise she made sounded like someone blowing bubbles through a straw. I shook her sideways and patted her back and jostled her to try and wake her, to stir her up and help her breathe, or puke, or somehow get the water out of her lungs so she could breathe. I was rough and frantic, she bit her tongue and it was bleeding, but I couldn't let her die. I couldn't hold her gently and let her go. No one was around as I stood there alone freaking out holding my bluish-white baby girl. I stood on the curb in my nightshirt and underwear waiting an eternity for help on a beautiful warm sunny Florida afternoon. I probably stood there five or ten minutes in reality.

A cop drove up first and he took her and put her on the hood of his car which was warm. She was freezing and in shock and he was trying to asses the situation. Then the ambulance came. The paramedics started working on her immediately. Mike came downstairs with some pants and sneakers so I could go with her to the hospital. While I tried to dress in the middle of the street I asked him what had happened. "Where were you!!!!?" I said in a pathetic accusatory voice. He said he and the kids were playing by the pool. Sean and he were throwing the Frisbee

back and forth while Lara was running around the pool. Sean accidentally threw the Frisbee up on top of an awning that hung over some tables. Mike stood on a chair and was using a stick to try and get the Frisbee down. We guess that while his back was turned as he got the Frisbee down Lara tried to imitate him and fell in the pool, because they found a chair in the bottom of the pool with her. When Mike turned around and couldn't find her he immediately ran to the pool but did not see her in the pool, even though she was at the bottom of the deep end he didn't notice her. He then thought she had gotten out of the gate that surrounded the pool and was afraid she was going to go downstairs and get into the street. He went downstairs to look for her and passed our neighbor Chuck who was walking his dog downstairs and asked him if he had seen Lara. Mike explained to Chuck how she just seemed to disappear and now he was afraid she was going to get in the street and get hurt. Mike didn't know she was at the bottom of the pool the whole time he was looking for her downstairs. When Chuck came upstairs from walking his dog he was the one who saw her and got her out of the pool. Mike came upstairs at that point and they both began working on her. We're not sure how long she was under there, we guess maybe five or ten minutes, but it all happened so quickly we just don't know. What is for certain was that it was not a short amount of time to be without oxygen, especially with the wait on the ambulance too since she wasn't getting any air then either.

Ironically, Mike was always the one who was so conscientious about the kid's safety. He was always telling me I was too lackadaisical and didn't worry enough. Even though in his mind it might have appeared on occasion that I was not paying attention to my children I was aware of their location and safety by their sounds and my instincts. I learned early on that noise was good, and silence was bad. Being a parent endows you with additional senses and you learn to tune in and out when it matters. You can tune into your child's safety and state of being and tune out the noise which is constant so you don't drive yourself insane. As I stood by the ambulance I could see Mike was devastated and blamed himself and my freaked out state and initial scolding didn't help him. But, I also tried to reassure him by telling him it only takes a second for something awful to happen. Even in my most watchful paranoid states I knew it was impossible to keep my eyes on them 24 hours a day and it was scary to realize this limitation as a parent, and that even my best watchful eye could fail. There were so many times I would be cooking dinner and turn my back and when I would turn around Sean would be standing there with a stupid grin on his face with a knife sticking out of the electrical socket even though we used safety protectors. There seemed to be a hundred other moments when my heart would be in my throat because of the panic that would ensue from close calls when I would take my eyes off of the little ankle bitters for two minutes to go to the bathroom or put a load of laundry in, and upon my return find one of them choking or in some dangerous predicament. One close call was when Sean microwaved his Power Ranger and somehow got boiling

plastic all over the kitchen, but none on him. He also stuck a can of V-8 juice in the oven without me knowing it and it exploded, thank goodness he wasn't in the kitchen. Thank goodness I *was* in the kitchen one morning when I heard the cat meowing for an hour only to find Lara had stuffed it in the vegetable crisper of the refrigerator.

Oddly enough I did have constant nightmares about Lara drowning before it happened. I usually don't worry about things in general, but I kept waking up crying and in sweats about her drowning in a lake, or a bucket, or a toilet. The dreams were so disturbing I would even tell neighbors who would watch her when I went to the grocery store to keep their toilet seats down because I was so paranoid. One of the recurring dreams that haunted me was that I would be driving down the road with Lara strapped in her baby seat in the back seat of the car. Somehow my car would veer off the road and go into one of those little canals that are on the sides of Florida streets. I was trapped in the front seat and as I looked over my right shoulder into the back seat I saw water pouring in through the windows, her little baby face panic stricken and looking to me for help. I sat in the front seat unable to free either one of us, the seatbelts had us both strapped in, and I watched the water cover her as she drowned before my eyes. Certainly hell could not be any worse than that feeling and that experience, that horrible nightmare.

We drove behind the ambulance that transferred Lara from the regular local hospital to one of the best critical care units in the state, Children's Hospital in Miami Florida. They didn't have the sirens on; the lights were just flashing. How strange I thought to drive so slow with a life hanging on the edge, but they had drained over a gallon of fluid out of her lungs before transferring her and there wasn't much else they could do. I remember hearing an *Enya* song on the radio as we followed the flashing lights through the darkness and the drizzle. The first time I heard *Enya's* music was exactly one month earlier when I drove with my Uncle Bill in the funeral procession as we followed the hearse that carried my Mother's body to the graveyard. And here I was again, listening to the same melancholy music, so sad and so beautiful, except now I was following the body of my daughter. I didn't cry when my Mom was buried. I didn't cry when we drove behind the ambulance. The music somehow wrapped itself around me and suspended my emotions and my thoughts; the reality of the moment sat in protection from my judgement as the voices and notes sang my sadness for me.

Mike and I walked through the two swinging doors of the emergency room following Lara, the paramedics, and several machines, monitors and tubes connected to every part of her body that were keeping her alive. A doctor in a white coat greeted us at the door and immediately began speaking. We watched our daughter wheeled out of sight as he spoke, "If she survives she will probably

have brain damage. There's no way to tell in these cases how bad it will be, but there really isn't any middle ground. The patient either recovers fairly well (after much rehabilitation) and they are able to carry on with life, or they are completely incapacitated."

It kept ringing in my ears... "If she survives, if she survives, if she survives... blah, blah, blah... if she survives...." I thought the worst of it was over. I could not even accept into my mind the possibility that she could die. She made it to the hospital with millions of doctors and machines, surely they could fix her.

They did a CAT scan. The doctor gave us the news, "There appears to be no brain damage at this time." My heart started beating again. Relief! She's going to be OK I thought, as I sighed a breath for the first time in hours. Then the doctor said, "Now we just have to wait and see what happens." With a puzzled look on my face I said, "What do you mean we have to wait? She's going to be fine right?" He said, "She has suffered a brain injury due to a lack of oxygen," the doctor said as he was trying to explain something to us. He was trying to tell us she would not be OK. He continued on... "It's kind of like when you get a bruise. When it first happens it hurts for a minute, and there doesn't appear to be anything wrong. But then the area swells and the surrounding tissue becomes damaged, and after time you can see the damaged tissue as it becomes red, black and tender. If the brain swells it doesn't have anywhere to swell because it is encased in bone. When the brain swells against the skull that is when the damage occurs because there is no room in the skull for the brain to expand. The amount of damage will depend on how long and how severely the brain swells. When and if the brain swells there is nothing we can do to prevent it and it will usually happen somewhere within 72 hours after the initial injury. After that time we will have to do another CAT scan and reassess her situation."

72 hours?! Are you nuts? In my mind I heard loud and clear "You've got to be fucking kidding me!" You mean I have to sit in this hospital room for three days waiting and watching my daughter slowly deteriorate? You think I can handle three days of waiting to see if she'll breathe on her own? You mean I have to spend three days of hearing beeps and watching monitors all possibly indicating the beginning of the end? Time had already stopped and each minute seemed like an eternity. I didn't think I could stomach three more days of this. I thought to myself, "I'll never make it." I did not know what the three days would bring. I only knew I had to guard myself against going insane, and there was only one way I knew to do that. I was determined not to judge, not to feel sad, but to pray and find peace and not be overcome by some dark thought that I had no room or time to entertain.



I looked around at the other children in Pediatric Intensive Care. To our left was a 2 month old baby that needed a heart transplant. I never once saw the parents, or any visitors for this child. There was also a teenager who was in a car accident and he was a mess, and a 2 year old who had constant uncontrollable seizures from the day she was born the cause being unknown. To our right was a six year old boy with asthma so bad he could not breathe and lay crying and gasping for air, and another 10 month old baby girl who had come in for a routine check up and was found to have severe brain damage for no explainable reason. These were the tough cases. Each child had their own nurse assigned to them that stood at the foot of their bed administering constant care. Each child was a 24 hour around the clock job with medications, treatments, machines, fluids, respirators, and whatever else was needed being given to them. All bodily functions had to be monitored and kept in check to keep these kids alive.

Lara was on a respirator the entire time. It breathed for her and all fluids went in and out through tubes. At one point they asked me to leave because they literally had to drill a hole through her skull, and they didn't think I could take it. They had to insert a device in her head to monitor the swelling of her brain. I came back in the room and she had tears streaming down the sides of her cheeks. I dried them off. I thought she wouldn't feel the pain because I thought she was unconscious, or at least on pain killers. They then told me she was conscious, and could hear and feel everything. They were just giving her drugs to keep her paralyzed; otherwise she would be awake and thrashing like a wounded animal and try to pull out all the tubes and the respirator. When I returned she looked like Frankenstein with a metal bolt sticking out of the front of her forehead. A one-year-old baby girl with 20 tubes running in and out, the respirator, the bolt and a constant array of beeping noises that I learned to interpret. My heart would sink every time the beeps fluctuated because that meant her brain pressure was changing or swelling and we sat there helpless. I was on the brink of insanity but I could not leave her side. I knew these could be our last moments together.

When I saw her tears and realized how much pain she must have felt having a hole drilled through her skull it was just too much to bear. Suddenly I flashed back to what I was telling my Sunday school kids just hours before. The words I spoke to them came back ringing in my ears; "Above all you have to trust. You can't see it as horrible, because that would mean God is cruel, and God did it and it was his will." The kids were saying how terrible it was that so many children died in the Oklahoma bombing, and how sad it was that so many families had to suffer because of it. I was trying to explain to them that the Oklahoma bomber could not exist without those families permission. When we fear our brothers and sisters and see them as thieves and murderers then that is what we are creating, and that is what they become to us. Then one of the kids said sarcastically, "So if a thief comes to my house and steals my stuff that's my fault?" I replied, "Yes. Not fault.

But a thief could not exist if you did not believe in one. Your mind is very powerful and creates everything you think you see. You always decide first what you want to see, and then it manifests. If you believe people are wicked then wicked people surround you. There is no such thing as faithlessness, some just have perfect faith that the world sucks or whatever their false belief is. We then seek for witnesses to our beliefs. But the only power in the world is love. Thieves actually love you the only way they can, by being what you have asked them to be - a thief. Everyone is your brother or sister. You have nothing to fear from them in truth, but you need to see them in truth not to be afraid." I was trying to teach them that they are responsible for their lives and what happens in it, and there is no such thing as a victim because we all create the world around us by our thoughts. I was trying to teach them that Jesus could perform miracles because he was not afraid of people, he saw their divinity, he knew who they were and that's how he helped heal them. He looked through the appearances of disease and sin and thievery and murder and saw people as God created them and how they are in truth because they did not create themselves. Likewise, we can help others and ourselves by doing the same thing, seeing through appearances and by this vision release them and ourselves from what we thought was real. In fact, the only thing that needs to be healed is our vision that sees duality and separation everywhere. The fall of man is to know "good and evil." We can see the devil or God in anything, but it has nothing to do with reality. Events are neutral; it just depends on what we want to see and that depends on which voice we listen to.

So the question was what did I want to see? I knew I could not allow myself to see the tragedy and the misery and the sadness of what "appeared" to be real. If God loves then there can be no sadness so I chose not to go there. If I really believed all that "stuff" I was preaching to my kids then now was the time to put it into practice. Again my Mom was on my mind. When my mother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer just months before I thought we had to fight it, we had to overcome it, we had to rally against the enemy and "heal" her. I was in great turmoil because I knew healing was possible, but I didn't know how to help my Mom. I prayed one afternoon and fell asleep. When I awoke a very clear voice said, "Her cancer is love." Love? I thought to myself if there is only love in the universe, if there is only oneness, one power and one presence the almighty God, then her cancer must be love. There could not be any duality. This new thought was so bizarre, but somehow it calmed me at the time. I knew the cancer was doing exactly what it was supposed to do. Exactly what it had been asked to do. Exactly what Mom ordered it to do. I was the one who was with Mom in the hospital when she awoke from surgery. I was the one who looked her in the eye and told her it was cancer. I was afraid to tell her because I didn't want her to be sad, but she smiled. She was relieved. She was bored with life. She only wanted to see us kids grown and happy and then she wanted to be with God and thought she had to escape through death to be with him. She did not have use for this

place anymore, but wanted to be free of it all, free of the turmoil and lack and the separation she felt. She was done. She used to tell me no one dies by accident. We all chose who are families are when we are born into them, we choose when we will die and how. Maybe not consciously, but on some level we choose just the same. If what she used to say is true I think how much she must have loved all of us to suffer so much so that she could say goodbye. I personally am not that willing to suffer so I'm just going to quickly "peace out" of here. We can deny our own power and blame life and everything that happens to us on some other power, but it's us. It's our beliefs, our fears, and our dreams all made manifest because of how powerful we are as creators, God's in training. The name of God is our inheritance.

I remembered after my Mom was buried my son Sean stood over her grave with his head bowed. "It's so sad. I'm so sad. Aren't you sad?" he asked me. I told him, "No, I'm not sad. I miss my Mom. I miss her a lot, but I'm not sad. She was just ready to go Sean." I told Sean it was OK to be sad if that's how he felt, and I left him there on the top of the hill to be sad for a while. He was little and young, he was a child that would not understand. I came back to the house and told my grandmother Nonnie (my Mom's mom) about how sad Sean was and Nonnie said, "You should have told him that your Mom is happier now because she is up in heaven. You should have told him that she's better off up there, and she's not in pain anymore". I told her "I can't do that Non. I don't want to teach my son that heaven is a better place than here. I don't want to teach him that we have to die to find true happiness, to find true union with God, or to escape from our pain. I don't want him thinking death is salvation." Sometimes I think that's what my Mom thought, and I think that's what we all think on some level. But when I sat on the porch with my Mom and she read the bible to me in eighth grade I believed what it said. That moment breathed in me and I believed the promises of hope and peace, and I did not want Sean to feel they were beyond his reach, or mine. I didn't know what to say to my son that afternoon as we looked at my Mom's gravestone, so I said nothing. I only knew what I did not want to say. And as I stood looking over Lara's twisted body I found myself in the same situation. I knew what not to believe, but I didn't know how to judge the situation, so I didn't. I didn't know what to say to myself, so I said nothing. I could only trust or go insane believing that this was God's will. I knew only that I wasn't being punished, and neither was Lara. So I trusted and accepted that I didn't know anything else.

Somewhere in the midst of everything going on and trying never to leave Lara's side I called my Dad and told him what happened. I told him how serious it was and asked him to pray for us. I didn't want to call anyone else in my family because I was not in the mood to talk to anyone, I didn't know what to say without crying hysterically on the phone, and I didn't want to upset anyone. There wasn't really anything anybody could do for her but pray. The next thing I knew I was

getting phone calls in intensive care and the whole family knew about it. I heard incredible stories about how everyone was praying so intensely for her recovery, and how many people got whole churches involved in praying all around the country. I was so shocked, and very touched. Before I knew it Glenn was by my side. He was, always has been, and still is an angel. It was his presence that brought me peace, and happiness. I looked at him bending over my precious Lara with tears in his eyes and I thought I am beholding a miracle. My sweet Glenny, a close first cousin, was diagnosed with brain cancer years before and was now standing here by my side holding my daughter's hand and praying with me. He beat the odds. He had been here before, to the dark side of the moon, and knew what I was going through. I had never experienced such acts of love before with everyone being so kind. I have felt alone my whole life. I have always had to be the strong one without the luxury of being able to depend on anyone for anything. When I did have to depend on anyone for anything they let me down so I built a fortress around myself so my feelings wouldn't get hurt anymore. My children were the only ones I ever let get really close to me. I even remember thinking before Lara drowned how scary it was to love my kids so much, but I knew I was the better for it, even if something happened to them I would know what it was like to have really loved someone and let them in. I finally knew what that old cliché meant, "It's better to have loved and lost, than to never have loved at all." For the first time in my life I did not feel alone, I had Glenn, I had my family's support, and my baby girl was still alive.

It's amazing how priorities change. Hours before the accident I thought my life was so terrible. My husband Mike lost his job and had not worked for a year, and I was working three jobs to try and keep us afloat. Our marriage was failing, and he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. We lost all of our money and savings with him not working, and we lost our house and the kid's money for college. My friend was walking down the street and flopped over dead in front of my house from a heart attack a few weeks before, my grandmother (Dad's mom) died on January 12<sup>th</sup> of that year, my mother died February 12<sup>th</sup>, and now here lay my daughter who may die March 12<sup>th</sup>. For three years up to this point I felt like that little cartoon character that walks around and no matter where he goes a little rain cloud follows him and rains on him. My friends had all turned their backs on me because they thought I was cursed. Child Protective Services showed up at the hospital and threatened taking the kids away in the middle of this anguish because some viscous neighbor called and spread lies about our family after Lara drowned saying we let the kids roam by the pool unsupervised all the time (yeah right), and meanwhile we were in the hospital wondering if Lara would even survive. We didn't have health insurance and I knew this little visit to pediatric intensive care at one of the best hospitals in the country would put me in debt for life (over \$100,000 for the week), but suddenly none of that mattered. It was like someone reached down and pressed my reset button. I realized I could die tomorrow. This wasn't a

practice run, there weren't any second chances, I realized my own mortality and that was the big joke! Death sucks! That's the biggie, and all of this little stuff in between doesn't matter. Now I know I can die so every day is a gift, \$4,000,000 in debt, who cares! All of my fears vanished. The only thing that mattered was my little girl. I didn't care if I had to change her diapers and clean her drool until she was 40. I didn't care if she and I lived in a trailer and I was on welfare and penniless for the rest of my life. If she could just stay with me I would take care of her no matter what, and no matter how bad it was. I had never experienced love like this before. The only thing I could not accept was her dying; I could not handle that. I just could not. If she died I would not be able to get over it. I would not be able to understand, I would not believe God is good, and all my studying and hope would be a big joke. I knew this was my biggest fear, that I would find out God and Jesus and healing and all my faith and hope and prayers and belief would be in vain and I would find out God isn't really real, can't help, sorry, wrong number.

I went down to the chapel. I got on my hands and knees to pray, but I didn't know what to pray for. I stayed there for about an hour sitting on the floor, rocking back and forth on my knees crying and sobbing. Of course I wanted Lara to be OK, of course I wanted her to be better than OK, I wanted her to be totally healed, but I didn't pray for that. My mind went over a million classes and lessons and all the learning and meditating. I knew from my studying and from my Mom's experience that the outcome was not what was important. I knew I could not "fight" it and "heal" it like when my Mom had cancer, because that would imply something was wrong. That would imply that something was lacking, and I knew it wasn't her that needed to be healed, but my mind that perceived these things as real. To ask for her to be healed would imply she was sick, or that something was wrong, and that would imply a battle between Good and Evil. If God was good and there was only good and love in the universe then evil could not be real, it could not really hurt you and could have no effect over you. I knew the only way to heal Lara and myself (healing being peace and union with God) was to see her in truth, perfectly fine as God created her despite what my eyes saw. I knew I needed a miracle (peace) but I wasn't sure what it would look like. If Lara didn't recover fully would I be disappointed thinking no miracle had occurred? But it dawned on me that maybe there was more to this than my small ideas of how things should be. My Mom was ready to die; maybe Lara had chosen a path I was not aware of? I knew love was there somewhere, in the midst of apparent chaos. I knew I did not know why this happened. I knew I did not know what this was for. And not knowing any of these reasons I couldn't ask for her healing because I trusted enough to know that maybe this was supposed to happen. All of my learning had brought me to this point. The main question in my life that still remained unanswered pivoted on this event, "Is God good and is he all there is? Can God and the power of who we are overcome anything?"

I felt like Sean must have felt as he looked down on my mother's grave, looking down on something horrible and not knowing what to think, not understanding. I felt like a small child. The only thing I had learned in all of my years was that I didn't know anything. I trusted this only because I knew it was true. I knew I didn't know squat. That was the only thing that felt right, and so I went with it. I finally sat up straight, rolled off my knees and sat there Indian style. I threw my hands up in the air and said, "OK Jesus, you said I can do this. You said miracles were possible and that I can do them, so show me what to do. I want a miracle." I stood up and told Jesus in my head that I would be listening. I knew I didn't understand anything. I didn't know what to do, but only that I should just listen and he would guide me. I didn't know why this happened, and I didn't even know what a miracle would look like; would she be partially physically healed, totally healed, would the miracle be her survival, or peace in my heart about the whole situation no matter what the outcome? I only knew that I wanted a miracle (whatever that was) and that I needed to listen.

A few hours after my prayer session I met a lady in the hall named Elizabeth. She was the mother of the little 10 month old baby girl who was just found to be severely brain damaged. She said she brought her into the hospital for something else and after running all these tests the doctor's said her daughter was going to be severely impaired for the rest of her life. Elizabeth was very distraught. She couldn't understand why something so horrible could happen. We talked briefly and I told her that the same thing could be happening to my daughter at that very moment. I told her we were waiting to see if Lara's brain would swell and how much damage would be done. Because I was listening for Jesus to talk to me I was aware of all kinds of different thoughts, and something occurred to me. I told Elizabeth, and myself, that maybe our kids were supposed to be brain damaged. Maybe they would be different from other kids, but be inspirational to other similar children, or grow up to work with other kids that have the same problems. Maybe they would grow up to be teachers or aids in a field that they would never have considered unless they were brain damaged. Maybe they would be stars of the "Special Olympics" instead of the "Regular Olympics". Maybe what they want is not what we want for them. Maybe they just want to be loved unconditionally and cradled and to live a lifetime without stress, a lifetime of us swaddling them in our arms and taking care of them. Maybe there was a whole life that had been planned for them, and for us, or that we chose superconsciously, that was going to be just fine. Maybe not great from our judgment of a good life, but something that's worthwhile just the same.

Peace came over me. I knew that if Lara woke up and was a total vegetable it would be OK. We would be OK, life would go on, and we would love each other just the same. I trusted what I had just told Elizabeth, and myself, and I made a

promise to myself at that moment to always remember this conversation and feeling, no matter how bleak the outcome and years afterward may be. I promised myself not to be bitter.

Glenn also helped prepare me for Lara having problems when they brought her out of her paralyzed state. He told me how he had gone through years of rehabilitation after his brain surgery. He used to drive down to Miami to see special doctors for his eyesight that was impaired due to the surgery. I used to take him to the doctors, and he would stay with us and tell me about the things that had changed and how he had to re-learn some of the basic things we all took for granted. I needed to hear that. I needed to be prepared for the initial shock of how bad things may be, but looking at Glenn I knew that there could still be hope, and that I could help her get over some of the hurdles that lay ahead. They had already scheduled Lara for rehabilitation and the rehabilitation specialist had casts made for her legs while she lay in bed. I would do exercises with her legs, and the doctor told me how she would need to learn to walk again after being in bed without any movement for so long. He visited her daily and said he would be working with her when she left intensive care.

The doctor explained what she would be like upon awakening, needing either intensive or moderate rehabilitation depending on the severity of the brain injury, but that rehabilitation is necessary in all of these cases. She would most likely have to learn to walk, talk, eat, etc...all the basics of life relearned. I asked the doctors several times, several different doctors, I asked them all, "Is there a chance she could wake up and be totally fine?" I was looking for the one doctor who said it was possible, but not one would say that. I did not find one doctor that said it was possible that she could come out of this totally unscathed. The best answer I got was that she could come out of it with mild damage, and after rehabilitation lead a relatively normal life again. The doctor that said that though also said after these injuries the kids are usually never quite the same. It may be something small, like a blank look on their face, but that there's usually something a little off that is never quite the same. I didn't care. As long as she could come home I would be happy.

The initial pain of resisting the present had passed. That's all pain is, resisting the present and thinking it should be different. The present was looking good, she may not die! I felt strong again. I knew I could deal with whatever else was ahead. I was prepared to accept that this was God's will and the way things would be. I started thinking about how my son Sean would react to having a sister that would appear retarded, and how to deal with him and other children's responses to Lara. I wanted Sean to be sensitive to her, but not overly sensitive and serious, not able to be lighthearted and laugh at some of the changes that would be ahead. I started thinking I would have to give up work to take care of her full time, and wondered

how I would make it. I started planning for a new life, a new circle of friends and situations I would never have traveled in unless I had a “special needs” child. I had no idea what was ahead, but I started preparing myself for the worst so when she came out of it a different child I wouldn’t be so devastated and I could help her. I decided that despite appearances of how she was I knew underneath she was fine, and we would still be able to smile and laugh and have a good life.

“Is it really God’s will that Lara should be less than perfect? Is it really God’s will that any of these children should be here in these varied states of agony?” Jesus asked within my mind. He was trying to talk to me, but I was talking back. I was trying not to listen, but instead rationalize why Lara may have problems for the rest of her life. I was trying to accept and prepare for the worst. I thought maybe Lara wanted this for some reason. Then I thought about all of my family and strangers praying for her complete recovery. I thought about me wanting her complete recovery. And then I thought about Jesus and how he performed his miracles. He knew it was not his brothers will to be blind, or God’s will, so being one with his brothers and God he knew he could offer them a corrected perception. Jesus disagreed with people’s fearful perceptions of themselves, because he knew they did not create themselves, and offered new ideas of health and forgiveness in place of what the crippled would choose for themselves. Where they had made a mistake, and they would allow the light in to correct the guilt and fear, Jesus’ presence healed them. So if it wasn’t my will that Lara be brain damaged, and it wasn’t anyone else’s will that she should be brain damaged, and if it was Lara’s or my will on some level but could be corrected, then if the outcome was bad it must be God’s will. I thought about God, could he really have a purpose for her to be impaired? I thought God must have a purpose for the crippled and depressed, for the poor and the tortured souls of the world or they wouldn’t be that way. I thought God must have a reason that the child next to Lara was gasping for every breath and in hell. And then the voice said very clearly, “It is never God’s will that anyone be less than perfect”.

The voice was calm. The voice was clear. My heart was touched, but my mind started racing again. Somehow this message hit me like a ton of bricks because I didn’t believe it since I’d spent a lifetime blaming God for everything! But that voice was too sure to doubt. I realized God had nothing to do with this situation. It wasn’t his fault, it wasn’t his desire, and I couldn’t blame him for this, or anything for that matter. I couldn’t blame anyone for this...it just was, like so many other things in life. OK, I heard you I said in my mind, “God wants Lara to be fine, that message is clear.” Everyone else wanted Lara to be fine. I wanted Lara to be fine. So surely there couldn’t be any reason she should be less than perfect. Somehow I realized I was not helping her by expecting the worst, but that was my modus operandi, to expect the worst so you’re never disappointed. I had perfect faith and confidence in the worst of everything! Even though in my heart I



wanted her to be fine I didn't believe it was possible because of what the doctors had told me and what my eyes had witnessed so I kept trying to bend my mind around accepting her as hurt. Then I realized I had to give up the chains, restrictions, reasoning and limitations I was placing on her that would keep her handicapped. I had to give up faith in what the doctors were telling me was reality and listen to the voice that was trying to speak to my heart. I had to look around at 12 suffering children and realize that this was not what God wanted. It was hard. It meant everything I saw had no reason, no purpose, at least none God had created because he would not create this suffering. It meant everything my eyes saw was false, because if it was not God's will then it could not exist. And surely all the crying told me it was real, and that their suffering was real. I knew only God's will existed and that there was no separation between him and us. But if this was true, if there is no separation between what God created as us, his eternal children that cannot be harmed, then what was I seeing? Either God was lying to me or my eyes were lying to me. I had to unlearn everything life had taught me. I had to find a way to look on these children with different eyes, to look on these children who suffered right in front of me and believe it wasn't real, because the voice I just heard said this was not his will and it was not real. It was the only voice that calmed me. It was the only voice that gave me hope. It was the only voice that didn't frighten me with dark shadows and perilous outcomes. It was a voice that asked me to do something...

"Look at your daughter. Look at who she really is." the voice said calmly. I was standing at the other end of intensive care staring at her. As my focus drew in on her my vision surrounded her like a telephoto lens closing in on its target. The voice spoke again, "Don't see the tubes, don't see the respirator, don't look at the bolt in her head, see past all that and look at HER. Go over to her and kiss her gently on the forehead, and when you do, for one second, just one instant, believe she is OK and not suffering, believe she is perfectly safe and fine in my arms and know that no matter what you see she is fine. She is perfect because she is not a body, and who she is can never be harmed. Believe she is my child, not yours, and know what that means." I understood perfectly in my head, but I feared I couldn't do it. I feared I was doing it wrong. I feared that if I didn't see her and know in my heart for sure that she was OK that she would not be healed. I feared that if she was not healed it was my fault, caused by my inability to do what Jesus had promised I could do. I feared I could not look past what a lifetime of beliefs had taught me, look past what my eyes saw (and what I knew to be the "reality" of the situation) and trust for just one second that what the voice told me was real, and everything else was false.

As I looked at her my love could not be contained. Somehow my love was moving me past my fear. It didn't matter if I "did it wrong", because suddenly the outcome was not important anymore. All that mattered was this one moment, all

of eternity and promises and knowledge and hope were defined and present in this one second of time, right there, right then. I choose the truth by listening to only one voice, the Holy Spirit, for only his voice brought peace to my heart. I knew no matter what my lying eyes saw her soul was free. She was perfect and loved and with God and with me and all the rest would take care of itself. I walked over to her with a strange knowing, a strange and peaceful sense of calm because something in me knew the voice was right. I kissed her on the forehead as tears dripped from my face onto hers. My tears were of joy! I felt immense and immediate complete RELIEF! I knew she was ok. If she died, or lived, or was a mumbling bumbling mess for the rest of her life I knew her heart and that smile and the joy of who she was, that holy untouchable part of her, would always be happy and loved. The comfort I felt was beyond words.

The voice asked three things of me. First, to know God's will for all of us is only good, perfect happiness and perfection. Second, to look on Lara in truth, past everything to the perfection of her spirit and know she is an indestructible child of God, always safe and always joyous and any suffering I experienced was because I was tempted to believe something else that wasn't true. And there was a third thing. But I can't remember the third thing. Was it something unspoken? I felt it, I heard it, but there were no words. I know there was a third thing, but I can't tell you what it was. I don't even know what it was. Perhaps it was thanks in my heart, or gratitude, or peace that settled upon me because I knew she was fine despite appearances. Whatever the third thing was it was not something I can express, or maybe even understand. All I know is there was a third thing. Maybe it was a communication between Jesus, myself and Lara beyond words and reason, or maybe a communion with God beyond comprehension. Sometimes I think the third thing is moving within me still, silent and needing no detection or recognition, but guiding and helping me. It wasn't earth shattering and it really didn't feel like a big deal. I was just aware of something else going on. All I know, maybe all I needed to know, is there was a third thing.

The three days of waiting continued on. It occurred to me that the crucifixion and the resurrection happened in three days, and it was right before Easter time. Most people's favorite holiday is Christmas which celebrates the birth of Christ. But this holiday I would learn the true meaning of the resurrection for me. Easter would be my favorite holiday from now on because it would always remind me of the day I got my daughter back from the dead.

The crucifixion was nothing more than an extreme example, a teaching device, that can be, and has been, misunderstood. I am not asked to be crucified, which was Jesus' own teaching contribution. I am merely asked to follow his example in the face of much less extreme temptation to misperceive. Jesus was perfectly immune to outer circumstances because he only listened to the voice of God which is the

Holy Spirit, not the voice that says “poor me, why me, I am helpless, blah, blah, blah...” Jesus did not do it alone, he was comforted and guided by the Holy Spirit, which speaks constantly to all of us. Now when I feel “crucified” by someone or some situation, when I begin to justify my anger or get depressed I remember that if Jesus could find peace in the midst of being crucified then it is possible for me to be at peace in less extreme circumstances, like when someone cuts me off on the highway, or bad mouths me with lies, or I have to hold my lifeless daughter in my arms. We are constantly asked to answer only one question in life, and that question is “Who are we?” How we answer that question brings us peace or misery, because we and everyone around us are either the beloved, totally powerful and innocent perfect children of an almighty creator, or we are not. If we are not we believe the myriad of lies that all scream of fearful ideas; that we or others are on some level or in some way pathetic sinning dirtbags who are worthless and helpless and alone having to scratch out an existence on this rat hole planet until we are killed or our body betrays us. The Holy Spirit always tells us who we are, and who everyone else is. It says the same thing over and over again, and if we’re not joyous then we’re not listening.

It is not arrogance to believe we are one with the Christ, it is arrogance to believe we are anything less. Our arrogance proclaims that we are sinners, and that we have created a state that is evil and more powerful than what God created. It is our belief in sin that is our tie to hell. If we can sin it means we can create something without God, something that offends God, and something so awful and strong he cannot correct it, or live with it. Arrogance indeed. We believe Satan and evil are real with power over us, but our dominion over them is only through the truth that they do not exist. We believe there is a war being waged daily without being silent and listening to the Holy Spirit which whispers that it is not so. We can have no peace here without realizing we are all powerful, and there is nothing here that can harm us. We believe we are not what God created, but rather helpless and small, not loved but made to starve, to suffer and complain, to be afraid and to die. We think we can somehow insult, or assail the kingdom of God. We don’t see ourselves as the incredibly powerful children of God, playing, all of us innocent. We pick sides and take life so seriously. When our children make a farting sound as they cup their hands under their armpits is it blasphemy? We may judge the folly of God’s children as more serious, but it’s folly just the same. Will the mighty kingdom of God fall because his children are playing? We expect punishment because we punish. We expect condemnation because we condemn. We feel guilty because we think we are doing or have done something wrong. The bible tells us, “resist not evil”, only because what is not real and cannot harm who we really are needs not be resisted. God cannot forgive us, because he has never condemned us.

And so then what was the Resurrection? The Resurrection was three days when death was turned into life. Three days when joy overcame sorrow. Three days when hope overcame doubt. Three days when sadness was turned into understanding. Three days when love overcame fear. And here I was, at the dawn of resurrection. The Holy Spirit was comforting me, and I in turn became the comforter for all of my friends that came to the hospital to make me feel better. I was the one telling them it's OK, and that it would be all right. They would look at Lara, tiny and broken on life support, and cry and fall apart. For three days I played tapes next to Lara's ears so she would know I was close. I played her *Enya* tapes, I found such comfort there and hoped she would too. For three days I put ointment in Lara's eyes to keep them moist, I moved her legs and did little exercises so her muscles wouldn't atrophy. I petted her hair and rubbed her body because it was so cold. Those three days turned into one long day without rest, but not without comfort. Three days filled with hope.

Somewhere in the midst of all the waiting something spectacular happened. I remember standing next to Lara's hospital bed. I was standing near her left hand with my back turned away from her. Someone in a white coat was talking to me. I don't remember who it was. I just remember staring at them kind of in a trance as their lips moved and I felt a strange sensation. There was silence as the person's lips flapped away and I nodded like I was listening but all I could feel was my brain tingling. It felt like it was snowing on my brain. For a couple of minutes I stood there with goose bumps inside my skull. It felt like a surge of millions of tiny little electric impulses were flickering and flowing, tickling my brain as if it was suspended from the rest of my body with the sun shining on it. I couldn't feel the rest of my body, I couldn't hear anything, and I just stood there wondering what was happening. I turned around and looked at Lara for an instant and thought, "Oh my God, Lara is being healed, and I can feel it!" Somehow I knew I was feeling a miraculous healing that was happening to her at that very instant, and all the brain damage was being fixed and she was being restored to perfect functionality. I was grateful and peaceful and acknowledged that something was going on. I stayed silent as the sensation continued on for a couple of minutes, and then it passed. The person who was talking finished speaking to me and left, as I nodded with understanding, even though I didn't hear one word they said.

Finally the time came when they were going to bring Lara out of her paralyzed state. They started by slowly turning off the respirator to see if she could breath on her own. That took about a day as she began taking breaths on her own. Finally, the respirator was removed completely. Next they ran series upon series of tests on the electric impulses coming from her brain, CAT scans, etc, etc, etc... A special neurologist was called in to interpret the results and was assigned to be working with Lara once she was out of intensive care. Then they slowly decreased the dosage of paralyzing medication. As several hours passes her body began

twitching and you could see her legs move, and her arms flail about as they regained feeling. Finally her eyes began twitching and she slowly opened them and closed them in her struggle to become awake. I was the only one there. The doctor wasn't watching, he was close, but he left this moment between us. This was the moment I had been waiting for that had finally arrived. I wanted to look in my baby's eyes and hold her and kiss her and let her know Mommy was there and everything was going to be OK.

She came out of it and kept looking up at the ceiling and said "boon", "boon". I knew I was the one who was supposed to be watching for signs of what was different than before. I didn't know what "boon" meant. She always spoke very clearly before, even for a one-year-old. At first I thought maybe her speech was impaired, but I didn't care, I just kept saying, "yes, boon!" I petted her hair and sobbed with gratitude that she was awake and speaking and it was all over. My whole body was trembling as if I was finally able to breath and release the trauma, and tears filled my eyes. She was still with me, and very happy and excited at the "boon". She became more animated. She still had the bolt in her head, and it was bizarre to see her trying to sit up with that heavy thing on her head, but she lifted her arm and pointed to the balloon that was flying at the foot of her bed and said, "boon!"

I suddenly realized maybe I had never heard her say the word "balloon" before, and maybe this was her first try. All I know is that despite the confusion of what "boon" meant everything else appeared to be fine. The doctor finally came over. He asked me if everything was OK. I told him as far as I could tell she was OK.

During the next day or two they transitioned Lara into a regular room. As soon as they did I began walking with her up and down the halls to strengthen her legs, as she was weak from not walking or using her muscles for several days while she was in intensive care. The first day the rehabilitation specialist came to visit her. "Do you mind if I take a look at her," he asked me. "No, go ahead." I said. I thought he was supposed to. He did some tests on her like making her get up from a sitting position, and had her do some other basic walking maneuvers. When he was done he turned to me and said, "Well, I had to come down here and see her for myself. I was written off her chart because they said she didn't need any rehabilitation. That maneuver of getting up from a sitting position is very difficult. I can't believe she doesn't require some type of rehabilitation. I have been working for 15 years with these types of kids, specifically kids who have been through a near drowning, and I have never seen a child that has come out of this kind of trauma and been totally fine and not need any rehab."

The neurologist came to visit her next. He did some tests on her eyes and other reflexes. He couldn't find anything wrong with her either. He said that I should

make an appointment with him in six months just to make sure everything was OK, and so that he could run some more tests. I threw his card in the trash that day and never called him back to make an appointment.

It had been about a week and we were almost ready to check out of the hospital. I took Lara out of the caged crib she was in to snuggle her in my arms and rest with her on a cot I was using pushed up against the wall. A white curtain was drawn all around us. I heard the clatter of shoes. I looked at the door and all I could see from the bottom of the curtain were pairs of shoes coming into the room. They shuffled in one by one, pair by pair, until the shoes surrounded the white curtain Lara and I were resting behind. They drew back the curtain and 25 or so doctors dressed in white coats surrounded us. Lara and I gently sat up half asleep as they all just stood there staring at us. I think it was the group who used to kick me out of intensive care twice a day when they would make their rounds. I assumed they were all the doctors and specialists and interns who would gather around the children's beds to talk over their injuries, medications, treatment and prognosis for recovery. I was never allowed to stay and hear what they talked about, but I really wanted to know what they said and what they thought about my daughter. I assumed the reason none of the parents could stay was because they talked candidly about the negative outcomes for most of the kids and it wasn't something the parents should listen to. Brilliant is the doctor who never takes away a parent's hope. But from all of their reactions afterwards and this overwhelming send-off I would bet they were not as optimistic when they gathered in their previous counsel groups around her sad little body. I don't know if that's the usual send-off for patients, but it surely made me feel like something special had indeed occurred. It was weird, they didn't do anything to her, they just wanted to see her, then the shoes shuffled out and they were gone. Looking back on the experience I think they were a gaggle of angelic angels all dressed in white coats, pretending to be doctors so they didn't scare us. When I took her up to intensive care to say good-bye the doctors were so happy to see her doing so well. Those doctors and nurses, all of them, were angels in their own right.

When I walked out of intensive care I was happy for me and my daughter, but I ached inside. I looked at the children still lying in the beds, and could feel the hearts of the parents who I had come to know. I was lucky. I got a scare and got to leave with no problems. There are so many parents that have very ill children. Those parents live in intensive care and fight this battle every day. They are brave and strong beyond measure and they totally inspired me with their positive outlooks. There are those that have great lives and do nothing but bitch about how crappy everything is, and there are those that have crappy lives and see such beauty everywhere. Those types of parents and people amaze me, and I give thanks for the strength of the human spirit every day which is so alive and well within so many that overcome so much. Some part of me still sits there, and walks

those hospital halls at night when it is quiet except for the sounds of the machines. Some part of me has not resolved this experience, because it is not over yet for me. I know I will return to healing and bring those I can with me to the happy side of release and God's happy will. I don't do it out of debt but from eternal gratitude for my daughters restored life, gratitude for my restored sanity and the joy it brought me which I want to share with everyone.

A tragedy is an event that happens suddenly, unexpectedly, and your life is never the same from that moment forward. It changes reality as you know it, and you are never the same. I will never be the same. I am grateful for every moment, for life, and my fears vanished. Whatever horrific or wonderful events happen in the future, they are events, and all is well.

There's no way I can convey how the experience changed me. There's no way to impart the peace, wisdom, and knowledge that were given to me as a gift. Everyone comes to his or her own sense of understanding anyhow. I am telling you all this for one simple reason. To say thank you. Thank you for your part in giving my daughter life again. Thank you for your prayers that do have power. Don't underestimate the part you played in her healing, or that you can play in the healing of someone you love or even a complete stranger.

I did learn something incredible about healing. We can't heal other people, because there's no such thing as "other people". We only heal ourselves, and in that process everyone is healed around us because God created one son, us, and we are all connected. We imprison or free each other by what we think with the mind we share with God for which we are responsible. My motivation used to be to heal other people because they were the ones I perceived as sick and I was fine, but that misperception of us being separate was the error. In this case for example I didn't have brain damage but my daughter did, so it would appear the problem would be to fix "her" brain damage. But, the only problem I could fix was the one inside me, my belief in separation, which always masquerades as many different forms of fear: *my* belief in brain damage; my belief that we are bodies that can be injured; my belief that I could be separated from someone I love; my belief in death; my belief that God is cruel, causes pain, has a will separate from mine, and would abandon me; my belief I could fail; my belief peace was impossible; and my allegiance to pain, suffering and imperfection. By giving up these thoughts I was able to overcome the nightmare I had of helplessly watching my daughter in the backseat of the car drowning in front of my eyes. By removing my own seatbelt (allowing the mote in my own eye, these fearful thoughts, to be corrected) I was free for an instant so I could reach out to her in peace which freed us both. That is why when she was being healed I experienced it too and felt my brain tingling. You can't offer a healing without receiving one. The miracle wasn't her physical healing, it was the correction of my erroneous fearful thoughts that she could be

injured, and the peace my mind experienced by joining with the truth that she was fine and is an indestructible child of God. The physical healing was the reflection, the effect of the miracle which had already occurred in spirit when I allowed my mind to be healed and let go of all fear and kissed her in relief and joy while she was still on life support. Our own perceptions and minds are the only things that ever need to be healed or fixed, our belief in separation is the source of all error and every problem in the world. Healing this one belief is the only way to save ourselves and the world around us. Do not be deceived, this one error is the only problem that exists, although it hides in millions of different and seemingly unrelated forms until you decide you don't want to be blind anymore and are ready to receive the one answer that fixes them all. Any fearful or painful thought is a belief in separation which is false and can therefore be corrected through the Holy Spirit, who rejoins our thoughts with God's. We share God's mind, and the name of God is our inheritance. We are invulnerable, powerful children of God. The only way to heal ourselves is to realize that there is nothing to heal. Our insistence that a problem exists creates it, maintains it, and keeps us from moving toward freedom from it. We have free will to use our power to create limitations and terrors of all kinds, or we can be restored to sanity and peace by accepting the truth that God created us all perfect and whole and we can receive heaven here now by joining with our source. Our will isn't free until we know "I can see peace instead of this" and thus have the ability to choose heaven or hell. God created one, we created the other without him.

A few months after Lara was home from the hospital she made reference to being out of her body when it happened. She remembers looking down on her self in the ambulance as the paramedics worked on her, and told me my dead mother was holding her hand, so I know the body is nothing worth getting upset over. Isn't that the source of all our pain, our belief in and constant attention to the idol of our bodies, the fence that appears to cut us off and separate us from everything and everyone? Nobody else needs to be fixed. If they wanted to be fixed, or healed, then they would do it, they would find a way, because certainly where there is a will there is a way. Our job is to keep seeing everyone whole.

I am realizing it is not what I leave behind as a legacy that is important, it is not how many people show up for my funeral and say what a great person I was or what a bastard I was. What is important to me now is the moment, my happiness in each situation. My yearning now for healing is a selfish desire to be peaceful in all situations...isn't that heaven? To be so connected that what you feel and know inside makes you totally happy and invulnerable no matter what appears to be happening on the outside... isn't that union with God, and everything? Is it really possible? Absolutely. Sometimes I drive home in pure bliss, I walk by a tree and it smiles at me and I smile back. There are moments of rapture that surpass my understanding and that's OK, I don't need to understand them. There are days



when I am successful at living without a specific purpose, I am not weighted down by wishes, I don't manipulate others or myself, I don't worry about the future, I just am, a lily in the field, and what I so desperately pursued falls into my lap, because someone is taking care of me.

Whatever means I use to separate myself from everyone else, and from God, are irrelevant. I can see the tubes and the machines going in and out of Lara's body, and I can see what I perceive to be wrong with the world. I can see our differences and fight over whom is wrong or right. I can spend a whole lifetime searching for the truth, and never see the incredible people standing right in front of me. It's not my job to change the world, just the way I look at it, that is my only salvation. If I see what is really here and now it is only beautiful! It is only joy and peace. This vision is our inheritance. Appearances are meaningless to the perfection of who we are. I can see mistakes in myself and in my brothers, or I can suspend judgment and look for what is real and what is true. When I listen to the Holy Spirit I don't hate myself when I am petty, and I don't judge others for their shortcomings, instead I can see their perfection and acknowledge who they really are. Not my small interpretation of who they are, but God's. Christ saw as God did, and what God created, not what we created. And I think that's what happened when we all prayed for Lara. We were bound in a common goal, the goal of love, the goal to believe and hope and pray that God is real, and listening, and able. As we can do nothing without God some people say, he can do nothing without us. The lepers in Jesus' time didn't walk down the street and God came down and healed them. It took another brother to look on the leper in truth, and to accept God's will for him when he could not accept it for himself because he forgot who he was and forgot there was another choice he could make. In this respect we are one, for only love can be shared and extended. Miracles are still possible here, they happen all the time, but they cannot happen without us. God needs our hands and feet and voices to bring the rest of our brothers and sisters home.

I started writing this story about my daughter, and yet it has also become a story about my mother Betty, Aunt Betty, Sister Betty, Daughter Betty to all of you. When my Mom died a big part of her thought she was a failure. She was not. Without her I wouldn't have made it. Without her my baby would not be alive. Without her I would not know how strong I could be. Without her many of us would not have laughed so whole-heartedly. And now that I am without her she has left me fulfilled. I have an inheritance greater than any amount of money. I give thanks to my mom, to my grandmother Nonnie for raising her, and for all of the strong and beautiful women and men in our family.

One of Mom's favorite quotes from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet* was, "Your children are not your children, they are the sons and daughters of life's longing for itself." My mother had the courage to question everything, the status quo, the way people

treated each other, the way people told her she should think or else she was going to suffer in eternal damnation. She had the courage to accept the fact that sometimes she didn't have the answer, or to realize she really didn't know, and that would open the way for new thought, transforming thought, not dangerous thought. She left this world a better place and life's longing for itself was not squelched by all of her fears. She had moments of triumph like all of us do. And in those moments of triumph when I witnessed her splendor and beauty I realized what was possible within me. I pass that on to my children, and to my Sunday school kids. And one day I will be gone, but that's what eternity is, the passing on of love, of the triumphs, of the spirit that dwells and breathes in all of us and moves on throughout time without ever ceasing just because our breath does.

There is so much hype about the new millenium and all the hope for positive spiritual change. Thousand of years have passed since the time of Jesus, and not a whole lot has changed. We still have war and famine and illness, we still have jealousy and daily irritations that we can't seem to overcome, lines at the supermarket that piss us off, slow drivers, stupid people that get on our nerves and people that bug us or threaten us and everything that we stand for because we can't seem to control them or tolerate them. We're afraid we'll go insane if they aren't all "corrected" or killed quickly and quietly and we call for everyone else's death with every second that ticks, without realizing through this we call for our own death. Then we forget the desire to kill is even within us, but instead make the problems "out there" where we have no control and no hope of peace, and that way of thinking will surely never lead us anywhere. We need these new thoughts, new ways of thinking and new voices that speak to us of ancient knowledge that isn't really new at all. We cannot afford to be afraid anymore and let our smallness consume us. I like to think of the "second coming" not as a time when Jesus comes again to save us, but rather as the time when the Christ becomes alive here and now in each one of us, as we practice and accept all that is ours. The last judgment to me is the end of the world, at least as I've known it, because it judges myself and everyone around me as totally innocent. Where is the fear in that?

I saw my Mother perform real miracles at different intervals in her life. I also saw Mom tortured by her fears and demons. But finally I think I see my Mom, in myself, and in all of us. Our lofty aspirations to be better than we think we have the right to be, our degrading moments when we act small and are ashamed, our day to day humorous and cranky selves that fuss and laugh, but are above all else human. I used to take offense at the word human. I thought it meant copping out of our oneness with the Christ within when we do not live up to that. But today it has new meaning. It is seeing the Christ in myself, and in everyone, regardless of what appearances show up. It is being great and small at the same moment and knowing that I am neither. It is forgiving what I judge to be wrong with myself and others and looking beyond it all with love to a wondrous spirit that was my

Mother's, and is mine, and is my children's. A spirit that breathes with joy and humility for all that is grand. And when I forget to listen to this voice and allow thoughts to frighten me by seeing suffering and injustice everywhere I wickedly try to find a laugh where insanity reigns in an attempt not to lose my mind.