

Musings, by Lois

Table of Contents

GOD, ALS, AND PRAYER (November 2002).....	2
Introduction	2
God, ALS, and Prayer	5
April 2020 Update to “God, ALS, and Prayer”.....	18
OUR ANCHORS (February 2012)	22
February 29, 2012 Introductory Email	23
Our Anchors	25
February 16, 2015 Email Update	37
April 10, 2020 Email Update	38
SHARING EXPERIENCES (September 2003).....	41
May 2020 Update to Sharing Experiences	42
September 26, 2003 Introductory Email	42
Sharing Experiences	45
EASTER MESSAGE	61
Easter Message 2020.....	62
Easter Message 2019.....	64

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GOD, ALS, AND PRAYER (November 2002)

Introduction

Writing about my life is certainly not something I ever planned to do. I've led a rather uneventful life; however, I suppose that having a terminal disease has made it a little more interesting.

Since March 2000 I've had nudges to write about how my illness has brought me closer to God; how He has used it to change me; and how He has given me the strength and peace to live with the disease as it progresses. As I grow weaker physically, I continue to grow stronger spiritually. That is much better than my previous condition of being strong physically and weak spiritually. And as a Christian I know that my life here on earth is just temporary and that death is just the beginning for eternal life in Heaven. I also know that it must be glorious because of what God has already shown me here on earth.

In the past few years I have become aware of a frequency of ordinary events occurring at the most amazing time. Like thinking about someone you haven't heard from for quite awhile, then suddenly getting a phone call from him or her. Some people call it luck, coincidence, blessings, miracles, or God-incidences, my favorite. I've thought a lot about writing about mine. But, I didn't want people to think I was crazy or a religious fanatic so I've only told a few people about them. However, I think that being disabled makes it a little easier for me to share my story with others. I'm learning to not worry so much about what people think of me. I'm now sure that I am supposed to share what I've experienced.

My pastor, Ray Dowdy, says that he's never known anyone to receive as many "miracles" as I do. I must admit that my illness has forced me to slow down so I tend to notice things others might miss in their busy lives. But I also believe that something within me (the Holy Spirit) helps me recognize a special message from God.

In January 2002 many incidents kept reminding me to start writing. An episode of my favorite program "Touched by an Angel" was about a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist. She was having headaches and episodes of slurred speech but refused to go in for tests for a brain tumor. She had just completed writing her memoirs but didn't include anything about meeting an

angel years before. She was afraid of what people would think. The angel had returned to tell her she needed to write the truth about God so everyone would know about Him, especially her family. And, she needed to do it now in case she died from a brain tumor.

Well, it sure sounded like a message to me. But, I figured that I'm not a Pulitzer Prize winning writer with an interesting life that people would want to read about. The next morning, it occurred to me that God often uses ordinary people. I thought, "Perhaps, I don't have to be a professional writer. Perhaps my writing is simple and easy for people to understand." But I was still concerned about what people would think.

Then while on the internet, a reference to a church in Palo Alto made me think about Karen, a young woman I worked with in 1976, who attended that church. We frequently did things together outside of work and she often mentioned God. If I was with her and she met a friend, she'd introduce us and later tell me, "God wanted you two to meet". Well, I thought she was a religious fanatic and never did accept the invitation to go to church with her.

As I think more about that friendship so many years ago, I realize now she was very spiritual. And, at that time I wasn't. But I still liked her as a person. I just didn't share the Christian part of her life. I realize you may read my essay and think, "Lois must be crazy or a religious fanatic". However, I think that if you know me you will still like me as a person. And, just as I now understand what Karen was feeling then, I hope someday you will think of me and understand what I am feeling, if you don't understand it already.

When facing death, I've heard that people are often asked what they would change about their life if they could live it over. We all joke about how we would never say "I wish I spent more time at work". That is so true for me. And, now I know I would answer "I wish I had a personal relationship with God my entire life." I realize what a difference God has made in my life the last few years. If I'd relied on Him sooner, I would have been a better person and that would have improved my relationship with family, friends, co-workers, and everyone else.

I hope my story will encourage you to start a personal relationship with God if you don't have one already. If you already have one, perhaps you know someone you'd like to share my story with. I know God has different plans for all of us. I feel I am supposed to share with you how God can help us in

our lives everyday, not just when we are in a desperate situation as I am. I feel that because I have a terminal disease God has shown me glimpses of His power to give me hope and encourage me to keep fighting and not give in to despair. I do not know why I am so blessed but I do know God is awesome.

I started this essay in January 2002 during a very spiritual period, however I did not share it with anyone. In October 2002, a few friends at my church urged me to follow the nudges to write and asked me to send them my essay, which I did. (Thank you, angels.) Once I let them read it; their encouragement made it easier for me to share my essay with others. I am ready to share my experience now. And, I have even added just a few of my “God-incidents”.

God, ALS, and Prayer

When I was a year old and my brother, Steve, was 4 years old my mother started taking us to the Knights Landing Community Methodist Church. Someone Mom barely knew told her about the Sunday school program there and invited her to church. (I will be eternally grateful to Fern Hunter, the woman my mom thinks invited her.)

Now I truly appreciate what Mom did for us, too. You see, my parents are Buddhist. Their church was in Sacramento and since Dad was a tomato farmer and often worked on Sundays, they didn't attend their church regularly. Mom felt any church was better than no church and she made sure Steve and I attended Sunday school regularly. We lived several miles outside of town so Mom drove us to church and often stayed for the worship service, although she never did convert. I still treasure a little children's book of prayer that I received with "6 months of perfect attendance" written on the inside cover.

The summer before I was in 6th grade, we moved to Woodland and I started going to the Methodist church there. I remember someone would drive me to church for worship service or Sunday school and I usually walked home across town. I'm not sure now why I was so dedicated...I guess it had become a Sunday routine for me. I also attended MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship) until I was a senior in high school.

Although I memorized many Bible passages in Sunday school, the only one I never forgot is John 3:16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life". I can still remember the room and reciting it.

As a college student, I attended church once when my dormitory Resident Assistant invited me to her church. As a young adult I didn't attend church. Most of my weekends involved activities like tennis, skiing, backpacking, camping, or hanging out with friends. I enjoyed my time in the mountains the most. The spectacular views and grandness of the trees, granite, and mountains helped me put my worries and life in perspective. I always felt spiritually renewed in the mountains. And, it was there that I felt there must be a Creator and I said "thank you".

I started going to Sunday worship services again several years ago just to

take my children, Travis and Taralyn, to Sunday school so they could learn about Jesus. Although I had learned about God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit as a child, I still had doubts about their existence as an adult. I went to church “just in case there really was a God”. I didn’t understand the relationship between God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. I certainly don’t remember anyone telling me I had to accept Jesus as my Savior and ask for forgiveness. John 3:16 was just a verse I had memorized as a child. I guess one could say the foundation had been laid, but that’s about it. I must have slept through the lessons and sermons because I certainly didn’t “get it” and I didn’t feel anything in my heart.

I had a very traditional Japanese upbringing since my grandmother, who was born and raised in Japan, lived with my family. And, although my dad was born in the U.S., he was also raised in Japan. As a child I learned to hold in my emotions since our family was not openly affectionate or emotional, which was the typical Japanese way. I also learned to depend on my inner strength to get me through any difficult situations I encountered.

I’ve had a very good life and I attributed most of it to my own inner strength, actions, and a lot of good luck. I remember seeing a movie called “The Other Side of the Mountain”, a true story about a young skier named Jill Kinmont. Her friend gets polio and says she thought that she was lucky and that someday her luck would run out. I had wondered the same thing about myself at times.

Well, in January 1999, I was diagnosed with ALS/Lou Gehrig’s disease. It’s an incurable, progressive, neuromuscular disease that results in death. In the advanced stages the person is completely paralyzed but the mind is usually untouched. It can start in the arms, legs, or with one’s speech, which is where mine started.

I thought my inner strength would be enough to handle having ALS, especially since I knew I’d have the support of family and friends. I planned to continue working at Hewlett-Packard (HP), adapt to the physical changes, and become an inspiration to others. But, as I thought more about it, I realized I wasn’t strong enough to handle it, even with the support of family and friends. I silently cried out “God, if you’re real, please help me.” And, He did. He helped me put Him at the top of my priority list and my job way down at the bottom. He showed me that I needed to spend more time with

Tara and Travis (aged 8 and 11, at the time) and my husband, Paul. And, He surrounded me with loving and supporting family, friends, Christians, healthcare professionals, ALS/MDA organizations, and e-mail (I couldn't talk much anymore, so e-mail allowed me to stay in touch with friends and boy could I type up a storm).

One of the first things God did was to comfort me. I heard songs about "Angels" whenever I listened to the radio in the van. When I was feeling depressed or started thinking about my future with ALS, an angel song came on. The first song I heard was "I'm Your Angel" by R. Kelly & Celine Dion, then "Angel" (in the arms of an angel) by Sarah McLachlan, then "When You Believe" (about miracles from an animated movie about Moses called "Prince of Egypt") by Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey. I told Paul and the kids about the songs and they started noticing it also. The song often came on when I was only in the van long enough to hear one song. Often, when I turned the ignition on, the song would be playing on the radio. I began to sense that God was telling me He had surrounded me with angels to help me and I cried, which was something I was not used to doing.

Once, Paul had taken the radio out of the van to work on it and I drove to Woodland without being able to hear an angel song for an hour. I was meeting my high school friends for a luncheon and stopped off at the local grocery store to pick up a head of lettuce, my contribution for lunch. The song "Angel" started playing on the overhead speakers.

Another time we were almost in Woodland when Paul realized the radio wasn't on. He jokingly said, "We should turn the radio on so Mom can hear her angel song". He turned it on and yes, "I'm Your Angel" was playing.

Some time after my diagnosis my sister-in-law Glenda called to say that her church, Capital Christian Center, was having Miracle Night and Joshua, her son, wanted me to know about it since their family was going. I figured since he was going I should go. Paul, Travis, Taralyn, and I arrived at the church early and as Paul pulled into the parking space "When You Believe", started playing. It was as if God was telling me that now that I believed in angels, I was ready to move on to believing in miracles. Was it coincidence or God-incidence?

When I left HP to go on Medical Leave in February 1999, a co-worker gave me a daily devotional called Streams in the Desert. She said the last time

she attended church was as a child, which I figure was over 50 years ago. She said she went to a Christian bookstore, told the sales person about me, and said she wanted to get me a special gift. The sales person recommended that book. God knew I needed that book. I didn't know what a devotional was and I didn't pray or read the Bible. I know that it really helped me keep my spirits up the first year I read it. The messages touched my heart and gave me the strength to face each day knowing that God loved me and was taking care of me. It continues to help me now. I've also given over 30 copies to friends.

I know God didn't want me to have ALS, but I know He is watching over me. I also feel He knew my future and prepared me for it. As I look back at the various jobs I've had, I learned something at all of them that have helped me cope with ALS. The 4 years I worked with the severely mentally retarded helped me the most. I learned about physical disabilities, wheelchairs, adaptive equipment, and therapy. I also consulted with the various therapists who now assist me. Ironically I had considered a college degree in occupational or physical therapy but ended up with a therapeutic recreation degree although I was an introvert. I know, hard to believe for those of you who know me now.

Several people have asked me if I was angry when I learned that I had ALS. I have to admit that I was not. When I graduated from college I volunteered at Stanford Children's Hospital in their oncology (cancer) and cystic fibrosis departments for awhile. I learned about living and dying from the kids there. They faced their illnesses with such courage and humor. I often wondered, "Why do these innocent kids have to die?" When I was diagnosed with ALS I was 47 years old, had a wonderful husband, 2 precious children, and a good life so I did not ask "Why me?" However, I have asked God "Why me?" when I think of the many special ways He has touched my life.

Having ALS has helped me realize what really is important and what isn't. I have had to slow down because of my physical weakness. I'm not involved in the "busyness" I was before. ALS made me "let go and let God". All of this has given me more time to focus on God and to notice His presence. I would never have done that if I hadn't had ALS. I have no doubt God knew that I would be able to rely on the Christian foundation that had been laid when I was a child.

In March 2000 I reluctantly agreed to attend the Walk to Emmaus, a Christian retreat. I'm sure that if I didn't have ALS I would not have gone.

Pastor Ray and a friend, Chris, first mentioned my going but I had many excuses for not going. Months later another friend, Christine, was a little more persistent about asking me so I finally agreed to go without knowing anything about it. Since they're held 2 or 3 times a year I had a feeling it would keep coming up until I went. I am so thankful now to all 3 of them. My going resulted in developing a personal relationship with Jesus and more spiritual growth. I was "born again" at my Walk. I call Chris and Christine my "Angel Moms".

The last morning of the Walk I had a supernatural experience that I haven't shared with many people. I had a terrible headache, my eyes hurt from wearing my contact lenses too long, and I had hunger pains because I was having difficulty eating food and wasn't drinking enough Ensure. It was still dark in the Sunday school classroom so I didn't want to wake the other women who were sleeping. I knew it would take me awhile to find my Advil, contact lens case, glasses, and can of Ensure, with a flashlight. I was not as steady on my feet either, and wasn't sure I could avoid tripping on the women sleeping on the floor as I made my way to the door. I decided to wait and rolled over to my right side. Then I felt a strong large hand firmly on my left shoulder. I was filled with peace and the touch seemed to tell me I needed to take care of myself. I knew I should take Advil, take out my contacts, and drink an Ensure. When I no longer felt the hand, I listened for footsteps and the rustle of a sleeping bag. But as I expected, I didn't hear anything. It felt like a man's hand and there were only women in the room. I gathered my things and went to the bathroom to take care of myself.

I didn't give it another thought until we stopped at a restaurant for dinner on our way home that night. I mentioned it to Pastor Ray and he seemed very interested. It was then that I realized myself how amazing it was. I have wondered why I was not shocked or excited when I felt that hand on my shoulder. I've decided that I was in a different state of mind from usual which allowed the experience and also kept me from reacting emotionally.

On September 9, 2001, Pastor Ray started a class to discuss the book "The Will of God", by Leslie Weatherhead. He had a sermon series based on it for a few Sundays also. (Note that it was the Sunday before 9/11.) Weatherhead talks about 3 kinds of will. God's intentional will (God's ideal plan for men), God's circumstantial will (God's plan within certain circumstances), and God's ultimate will (God's final realization of his purposes). In the chapter about circumstantial will, the following statement caught my attention immediately.

Given a spiritual awakening so glorious that the personality lives in close co-operation with God, the healthy body is more in line with his will. But so many healthy people are spiritually asleep and are not co-operating with him at all, and so many sick people have, through the sickness, become spiritually awakened during their illness that out of the circumstances of evil they have created and set free spiritual energies far more valuable than the spiritual apathy of the healthy person.

It explains what happened to me. I have been spiritually awakened and it is pretty amazing. Sure, I still have my ups and downs, but I know God is always with me and that is very comforting. There's a peace that comes with that assurance. I certainly wish I had been spiritually awakened when I was healthy though, so I hope you learn from my situation. But, I have learned from others that it seems to happen often when people are faced with a crisis in their lives. I guess when things are going well, we don't think we have a need for God. What a mistake that is. I wish that when I was healthy I knew then what I know now.

Something I've learned to do as a result of ALS is to pray regularly for others and myself. I prayed in church during Sunday worship services before but I was always under the impression that praying for oneself was selfish. And, I thought God was busy helping others with bigger problems than mine, so I shouldn't bother him with my petty problems. I thought my having ALS was big enough to bother Him with so I did finally pray for myself. I also thought there was a certain way to pray, but now I realize it's just talking to God. And, He has helped me buy a book and directed me to a particular store so I guess He doesn't mind my unimportant questions. However, when I was healthy I did what I wanted and never bothered to ask God what He wanted me to do. In fact, I actually preferred it that way. I've come to realize life is easier when I follow God's direction. Things just seem to work out better. I even receive a lot of things I need for free or on discount.

One of the most amazing days I have had was a few days after my Walk. I dropped Travis and Tara off at school and happened to see an acquaintance. We hadn't really talked to each other before, but he talked about a concern he had. Later, when I got into my van I silently asked "God, should I buy him Streams in the Desert?" I started the van and the radio DJ was talking about a book. He was going on and on about how wonderful it was. Finally

he said “If you don’t have Streams in the Desert, go to the store and buy it!” Well, that was a pretty clear answer to me. But, as I was driving I asked, “Should I go to Auburn or Roseville?” The larger store in Roseville was 20 miles away and the Auburn store was only 5 miles away but very small. I decided to go to Auburn. But when I got to the freeway on ramp, it was closed because a Cal Trans crew was working on it. I turned around and decided to take a back road to the next freeway on ramp. But, I couldn’t get to that road because the County road crew was working on it. Now, there were other ways to get to Auburn, but having been blocked twice I felt I was supposed to go to Roseville.

While driving there I asked, “How many books should I buy?” I sensed I should leave a display copy but buy the rest. There were 3 copies so I bought 2. I had one gift wrapped for a man and sensed the other should be wrapped for a woman. On my way home I gave the man his copy. When I got home I checked my e-mail. I had a message from a woman I had worked with. She wrote that she had just come home from having emergency cancer surgery. She had gone to the doctor, learned she had cancer, and was scheduled immediately for surgery. I knew the extra copy of Streams in the Desert was for her. The woman who gave me my copy was a friend of hers. A few months later I decided to go to the store in Auburn. A second-hand-children’s clothing store was where the Christian store had been and the woman in the store told me the bookstore had closed in March. Was it coincidence or God-incidence?

It’s mind boggling when I think of the plans He has for each of us, how He connects people and events in our lives, and the timing of everything. It is beyond my understanding, but I know He hears my prayers, because too often now they’re answered. And, if I don’t think they were, I’m better about waiting. I used to want to be more patient and I ended up with a husband, 2 kids, and now ALS. I also wanted to be a better listener and ended up not being able to talk. Be careful what you think about and pray for. You may not get what you expect. I’m still working on patience and listening, even though you’d think I’d be good at it by now since I’m pretty dependent on others for everything. However, I know I’m better than I was a year ago.

Sometimes I think that if God already has a plan, what good are my prayers, especially the ones for other people. I subscribed to the magazine “Angels on Earth” and the Nov/Dec 2001 issue had a letter from Mary Canniff of Tracy, California.

She wrote:

Once I didn't believe that prayer could really change anything. Then I read "From Your Lips" in the Nov/Dec 1999 issue. It was about a hospitalized man who felt cold in his sleep and dreamed that to warm him angels were making a quilt out of the many prayers his family, neighbors and friends had said for him. By the time the angels were done, he was completely covered, warm and comfortable.

That story changed how I think about prayer. Now, instead of thinking they are not enough, I offer my "prayer scraps" for angels to collect and sew into quilts of God's love.

Well, her letter made me look at my prayers differently, too. Now I think of people I'm praying for covered by a prayer quilt or comforter and when I "lift a person up in prayer" I think of the person lifted closer to God by each person praying for them. And I enjoy praying because it makes me focus on God and others as well as spend time with Him. Oh, I thought it interesting that Mary's letter appeared a year after the article she mentions. Usually letters appear a few issues later. And, this was the first issue I received. I only subscribed to it because Travis needed one more magazine subscription to get a certain prize. Was it coincidence or God-incidence?

In addition to feeling warm and fuzzy knowing so many people are praying for me, I also believe in the power of prayer. Life expectancy for those of us with ALS is 2-6 years on average. And, 50% die within 3 years of the diagnosis. Bulbar onset ALS (where it starts in the mouth area first, like mine) is considered the worst because swallowing and breathing can be affected in the earlier stages of the disease, so life expectancy is shorter.

Well, my slurred speech started in March 1998. I know others with bulbar onset ALS who have lost their voices completely. My family still understands me most of the time (I think there's some selective listening and "tuning out" involved.... remember I have 2 school-age kids and a husband). I've joked that yelling at the kids is good exercise and that's why I still have a voice, but now I think God is waiting for me to use my voice to say loving things.

Well, if you've been praying for my "healing" you may be wondering if your prayers are helping. Let me say that in addition to covering me with a warm blanket of prayers to comfort me, your prayers are indeed being

answered. I haven't lost complete use of any of my muscles and I know a lot of healing is going on within me. God is really changing me.

In September 2001 I attended a Holy Spirit Conference in Yuba City. The speakers and sessions were wonderful. I was particularly interested in going to a session called "Healing Prayer". I went in with Ruth, a woman I'd met at my Walk. There were already about a dozen people sitting around the tables, so I searched for a space that would be easy for me to get to since I was using a walker. I chose a seat at the corner of the table and Ruth sat next to me. Each place around the table had a Bible and as people started looking at them, the instructor informed us that there was a bookmark with a particular verse she wanted us to read out loud when the time came during her talk. Since I can't speak, anxiety hit me as I looked through my Bible for a bookmark. I couldn't find one so Ruth mentioned it to the instructor and she replied that there was one Bible without a bookmark. I was amazed. I didn't know the instructor, she didn't know I would be at that session, sitting at that spot, and she didn't know I couldn't speak. I knew I was in the right place and that God was expecting me. At the end of the session I did ask her why there was one Bible without a marker. She said that as she was putting them out, she knew she was supposed to leave one Bible without a marker. She did not seem at all surprised by it like I was. She didn't question it. She just obeyed. By the way, she is a pastor. Was it coincidence or God-incidence?

Well, the session was very insightful. Pastor Holly shared some stories of how "healing" can mean something other than what we are expecting. I shared with the group that after my diagnosis, my healing first started with my heart. I was healed of a childhood resentment that I just couldn't get rid of on my own. I also was healed of something from my childhood that I didn't even realize bothered me still. At the end of the session the group prayed over me. I was not miraculously healed of ALS, but I have no doubt that some kind of healing that I didn't notice did occur.

Pastor Holly read several stories out of the book "Stretch Out Your Hand" by Tilda Norberg and Robert D. Webber. It's about healing prayer so I bought a copy at the conference. I was amazed when I later read the following story.

The temptation to impose our agenda for healing. It is enormously tempting to pray for healing while insisting on our agenda for the person prayed for. This does not mean that we should pray only in vague generalities. It does mean that we trust

that God loves this person even more than we do and that God knows what is best better than we do. It is crucial to pray for specifics only after we have discerned what God wants to do for the person.

A healing team of which Tilda was a part learned this in a process that was both painful and deeply moving. Jeff, a twenty-one-year-old college student and a member of the track team, found out that he had amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also called Lou Gehrig's disease... When Jeff first heard that he had about 2 years to live, he was furiously angry. He railed. He swore. He yelled. He cried. He could not stand to see anyone who was healthy or happy. He was going to die and he was certain no one cared, not even his parents.

When our prayer team began to pray for Jeff, we prayed earnestly that he would be healed of ALS, that he would go back to school and run again. We prayed that he would not die. Sharing Jeff's feeling that death at such a young age was unfair and awful, we prayed with our own agenda. We yearned somehow to magically control what was happening to him.

We all liked Jeff a lot. It was very painful to see that each time he came for prayer he had less and less control of his muscles. His disease was progressing fast. The healing team was bewildered and upset. Yet God was powerfully at work. God met Jeff in all of his fear, confusion, and despair and started to change things for him.

Through our prayers Jeff felt prompted to deal with his troubled relationship with his parents. As he began to face their very real rejection of him, he expressed his rage—and then let it flow away. After letting go of his anger, he was able to see them clearly as two broken people who had loved him the best way they could. Soon he forgave them and came to appreciate them for the first time in his life.

He also admitted that he had caused pain to a number of women friends... He started writing to the women, asking their forgiveness. Most of them forgave and supported him during his dying process. As these personal matters began to clear up in his life, Jeff began to feel better, despite the progressing of the disease.

Gradually the prayer group began to see that God was healing something within Jeff that we had never considered. It was hard for us to let go of our agenda for him, but the more we were able to surrender, the more Jeff seemed to benefit from our prayers.

As Jeff invited Jesus into his life more and more, his spiritual life

deepened into radiance. He began to be so certain of God's love that he would say to people, "I know I'm dying, but I wouldn't exchange my life for anyone else's in the world. I know I'm dying, but I've been healed. I know I'm dying, but if I didn't have this illness, I would never have had this joy." And, indeed, it was obvious that Jeff was living in profound joy.

About a year before he died, Jeff began to be unafraid of dying; in fact he was almost eager for it, looking forward to death as an adventure. He and a friend made a video of his last months, in which he tried to relate the message that even death for a Christian is finally not a tragedy. For Jeff, death was his healing, setting him free from pain and bondage and ushering him into new life.

Jeff deeply touched all of us who knew him. We had not wanted his kind of healing in the beginning. We found it hard to give up our agenda and were terribly saddened by his death. But clearly Jeff had been healed, and it seemed that God had used our prayers.

Wow! I could certainly relate to Jeff's story. It was so similar to my own experience. My heart is certainly being healed. But, I think that there is some physical healing going on too. The disease is progressing slowly in my case and I have noticed some improvement eating, swallowing, and drinking which is not typical. God is changing me from the inside out. Thank you for your prayers. They are being answered.

I have one more fun story to share with you. There's a lot more to this God-incidence that I could share, but I will keep it simple here. After you read it, please think about the span of years involved and the timing of everything.

Our 15-year old yellow lab, Nani, died in August 2001 and our 7-year old cat, Milo, a few weeks later. Both were outdoor pets, so Tara started asking for an indoor cat and Travis wanted an indoor dog. Since I was getting worse, Paul had to do more, and winter was approaching, we said "not now". I continually prayed about it, though. They kept asking and in February, Cassie, a woman who was putting a ramp in our house, mentioned she was a foster parent for rescued animals. She told us about a sweet cat she had with long white hair. Not exactly my choice of hair, but we let Tara adopt Danny. Of course Travis kept asking about his dog so we asked Cassie to keep us in mind for a small dog suitable for indoors. We weren't interested in training a puppy since we'd never had an indoor dog before (we live in the country surrounded by weeds and dirt) and we knew the house training would be a lot of work.

In July we were going on vacation for a week so I remembered Cassie had offered to watch Danny for us. So we contacted her and arranged to leave him with her on Saturday since we were leaving on Sunday. Friday night we decided to watch 1 of the DVDs Paul had bought several weeks before. I was happy when the kids chose "Old Yeller". I had often suggested renting that movie when they were younger, but they always picked another movie. Paul and I hadn't seen the movie since we were kids so we were surprised the older boy in the movie was named Travis. We had fun saying "Travis, we got lots of corn", or "Oh no, Travis", etc. Well, our Travis didn't think it was funny, but he did keep asking us when he could get a dog.

The next day Paul and Tara took Danny to Cassie's and when they returned they said she was looking for a home for a 4-month old yellow lab she had. A woman at her church had told her she wanted a yellow lab pup so when Cassie saw someone giving Nala away, she took her for the woman. But when she notified the woman, she learned that the woman had already purchased 2 puppies so she was stuck with Nala. Paul and I discussed it and decided we'd ask Travis if he were interested. Of course he was, so he let Cassie know we'd pick Nala and Danny up when we got home from vacation. It seemed perfect. She would be spayed while we were gone and somehow since her name Nala was so similar to Nani, it seemed like my prayers were answered. But while on vacation I wondered if we were ready for a puppy. I continued to pray about it. When we got home Paul took the kids to pick up their pets.

When Nala walked in the door, she was so cute but frisky. I wondered if we had made the right decision. Were we really ready for a puppy? Then Paul walked in and said our new handicap license plate for the wheelchair van we bought in January finally came in the mail. When he took it out of the envelope we saw it was K9398. "K9" seemed to be the answer to my concerns. I sensed Nala was a blessing from God. Paul said that he had doubts about a puppy too, but "K9" also made him feel better. And remember 3/98 is when I first noticed slurred speech, the first ALS symptom I had. It's as if God was saying He knew in 3/98 that I would need this van and that Nala was indeed a gift from Him. She has been an unusually good puppy. And she and Danny are great company for me when I'm home alone. Although they are both pretty mellow, they are often entertaining and keep our entire family laughing at their antics. They are just what the doctor ordered. Was it all coincidence or God-incidence?

Since I'm home alone a lot, I've had plenty of time to focus on God by praying, reading the Bible, listening to Christian music, and watching Joyce Meyer's Life in the Word TV program (I just love her message and recently got to see her speak in San Jose). As a family, however, we still need to include God in our lives everyday, not just Sundays. It's not easy to do since we're not in the habit of doing that. But we are improving; we give thanks before we eat and we listen to a Christian radio station when we are going somewhere in the van, although portable CD players make it easier for the kids to listen to their own music. It may take awhile for us to change our old ways, but I know all the prayers for our family are helping. God has surrounded Paul, Travis, Taralyn, and me with many angels. Our church family at Newcastle United Methodist Church has been especially supportive. We continue to learn from them as Jesus shines through them in all they do.

I recently heard that when facing death people often think about what really mattered in their lives and what they will be remembered for. I realize now that what matters to me is love. As I've grown closer to God and felt the love He has for me, I want to share that love with others, especially my family. Because of my upbringing, it's not easy for me to express it in my actions and words, but I'm working on it. I hope that God's love will shine through me and people will remember how He blessed me.

While watching the movie "A Christmas Carol" last Christmas, Bob Cratchet said something that caught my attention for the first time, although I've seen the movie dozens of times. He says that Tiny Tim told him "he wasn't going to feel shy if people looked at him because he was a cripple as it might be pleasant to them in church to remember upon Christmas day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

Perhaps when people see or think of me on any given day, they will also think of Jesus and God.

MAY GOD BLESS YOU AS HE HAS BLESSED ME

Lois

April 2020 Update to "God, ALS, and Prayer"

When I wrote "God, ALS, and Prayer" back in 2002, I had no idea I'd still be alive 18 years later. Never give up hope! Who knows what the future holds for you?!

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

After I emailed the essay in 2002, I made copies for friends at my church who didn't receive it by email. After the service the following Sunday, a woman told me that she had read my essay. She bent down to get closer to me since I was in a wheelchair and whispered, "You are closer to Heaven than most of us" and walked away. I wondered what she meant by that.

Within a few years of writing the essay, I emailed or gave out paper copies to about 400 people. At a Sacramento ALS Association monthly support group meeting a young Japanese woman whose aunt had ALS told me that someone she knew in San Jose, California had emailed my essay to her. I didn't know the person. I have no idea how many people have forwarded the essay to others.

I also sent an email about my essay to the Broedel's ALS Digest website. It had a collection of emails which could be read on the website. (Social media has come a long way since then!) About 40 people asked me to email the essay to them. I couldn't tell where they lived from their email address. I was surprised a few months later when a man emailed a copy of the essay back to me in Spanish. Eduardo said that he had ALS and lived in Mexico. He liked my essay and wanted to share it with his family and friends so he translated it into Spanish. He wanted my permission to distribute it. I could not believe it was in Spanish!

In 2005 the essay was translated into Japanese. My dad was able to read it before he died in 2007. I wrote about how God orchestrated everything in my essay "Our Anchors" which was written in 2012. My mom died in August 2015 a month after celebrating her 90th birthday. I'm glad they both had the opportunity to read my essay.

I stopped using a computer in 2004 when I couldn't use my fingers anymore. In 2011 when I got a speech device/tablet that I could operate with my eyes, I Googled myself for fun. I was surprised to see a link to my essay. It looked

like Eduardo had sent both translations to an international ALS website. I was able to tell people to Google me to find a link to my essay until it was removed in 2013.

Around that time several Woodland High School graduates from 1960 to 1969 decided to have a decades reunion. A team created an amazing website (whs60s.org) listing all the students by graduating year. We could also create our own profiles. And, we could also communicate with each other in several different ways. I enjoyed the Message Forum where people posted about their high school memories. Eventually people started posting about other things. I reconnected with some people including a classmate who is a pastor in Ireland now. I was able to email my essay to Tom. He replied that I probably didn't remember him, but he was in MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship, too. I didn't remember that. But I did remember him from school. He also said that he posted the essay on various sites with about 7k readers. Since I don't wear my glasses to operate this machine with my eyes, the text is a little blurry. At first I thought it was 71. But 7,000? No way! He wrote that I lived in Newcastle, California, not Newcastle, Ireland. Lol. He also posted it on the Message Forum so 800 Woodland High 60s graduates could have read it. It's just incredible how this essay has been passed on.

"With man this is impossible, but with God nothing is impossible." Matthew 19:26.

When I read the essay now, I'm surprised by how well-written it is. I can't believe I wrote it. Lol. But, it was during a spiritual time so I know I had help. However, there are a few things that have bothered me. When I typed the title, "God, ALS, and Prayer", I knew that according to the rules of grammar a comma didn't go after "ALS". It's the only rule about commas that I remember. But every time I deleted it I was compelled to put it back in. A few years ago it occurred to me that another word is supposed to be after "ALS,". I'm thinking it's "Healing". "God, ALS, Healing, and Prayer" sounds like a great title for another essay.

I also struggled with using "severely mentally retarded". I hope I didn't offend anyone. I knew it was not politically correct. However, at the special education school where I worked it was the proper terminology. I didn't think the politically correct terms like "intellectually challenged" or "developmentally delayed" adequately described the students I worked with. I had a 21 year old student who was in a wheelchair, wore a diaper, didn't feed herself, and didn't communicate.

After I wrote the essay I also remembered that when I was in college a girl in a few of my recreation classes invited me to Young Life. I didn't know it was a Christian club. I was more interested in the Asian club since my high school didn't have very many Japanese students. I think God was trying to draw me back to Him. At the Walk to Emmaus we were told that God is always "wooing" us. I can see that now when I think about my past. What I find so interesting is that a lot of people have names from the Bible or related to Christmas. I didn't mention Karen's last name in the essay. I don't think she'll mind me telling you that it was Emanuel (God is with us). Hmm. I hope that our paths will cross again someday so I can thank her.

I also realized I wrote that Mary's letter appeared in the "Angels on Earth" magazine a year after she read a letter. But it was actually 2 years. Well, I feel a lot better now that I've clarified all that.

Sadly, the pets that I wrote about in the essay are no longer with us. Danny died in January 2017 and Nala died in November 2017. They gave us years of love and joy.

In August 2018 I contacted the "whs60s" website administrator for help. I tend to have problems on that site. Gary changed my email address in the necessary places for me. He saw the comment in my profile letting people know they could contact me and I would email a copy of my essay to them. Gary thought it would be better to have a link to my essay. I am technology challenged so I didn't know that was possible.

A few days ago Gary created "Musings, by Lois" and a Table of Contents with the essays. He has motivated me to finish this update which I started in June 2018. I know Gary from MYF and more than 50 years later he's helping me with my computer problems and with sharing my story. God has certainly surrounded me with earthly angels.

Technology is fantastic. I now read the electronic version of the devotional Streams in the Desert on my machine/tablet. (It's also available online.) I read the devotional Our Daily Bread online. I can also listen to the message, scripture and prayer, which is really nice. I enjoy TBN, Trinity Broadcasting Network, on TV. It has live shows like The 700 Club as well as videos of sermons by different pastors. I also like the talk show Praise. They have over 500 old episodes that can be viewed. I liked the episodes with Tim Tebow, Darryl Strawberry, Bear Grylls, and Stephen Curtis Chapman. And, so many

churches have websites and worship services online now. I really don't have an excuse for not going to church or learning more about God and the Bible.

I never imagined a diagnosis of ALS would result in this amazing relationship I have with God. I continue to have God-incidences and have had 3 spiritual experiences; in March 2000, January 2002 and May 2018. I understand we are all on different paths. I believe I'm supposed to tell you how God has revealed Himself to me, has given me hope, helps me, and blesses me in the midst of ALS. What He does for me, He can do for anyone.

God bless you,

Lois

OUR ANCHORS (February 2012)

Lois Kawata
April 2012

February 29, 2012 Introductory Email

From: Lois
Kawata
Sent: Wed
2/29/12 8:06 PM
Subject: Nudged
to write

2/21/12

Hi,

I am feeling that nudge to write again. I usually ignore it until God sends me a message that I can't ignore. In 2002 it was a couple of episodes of chest pains. I just don't know what I'm supposed to write about. Surely people don't want to read about how I think he uses songs on the radio, TV shows, crossword puzzles, etc. to get my attention.

I have been thinking about how anchors have been coming up on TV lately and how bizarre it's been. Am I supposed to write about this?

Several months ago I was asked to write a letter of recommendation for someone. I'd been procrastinating but on Monday, February 6, I downloaded Roget's Thesaurus to my Dynavox. I can access the book by going to the file directory but it's easier to create a shortcut on what looks like the Jeopardy board. The first books Paul downloaded for me were Bartlett's Book of Quotes. (Bible Quotes, Love Quotes and Words to Live By). I noticed a Bartlett's book was saved in the first square in the column on the left and decided to save Roget's thesaurus in the same column. It was almost 6:30 so I stopped using my machine in order to watch Jeopardy. (I don't use my glasses for the machine but need them to watch TV.) I was surprised when the first category on the left was "Roget's meets Bartlett's ". A few columns to the right the category was something like "Bio Pics". The first clue was about a former student writing about weekly talks with his dying professor. The answer was "Tuesday' s With Morrie". A few squares down the clue was about the physicist who wrote "A Brief History in Time" and "The Black Hole... " and the answer was Stephen Hawking. Both have to do with writing and ALS. Someone once told me that Hawking could learn a thing

or two about God from me. I felt that God was telling me to write. There are so many times when what my caregivers and I talked about that day or an answer to something I wondering about is on Jeopardy that night. It's really uncanny!

Ash Wednesday 2/22/12

Tuesday night I didn't feel that there was anything I had to give up for Lent. So I asked God if there was something He wanted me to give up. Big mistake. I was in bed when "stop procrastinating " popped into my head. I got the message. I decided to write about God incidents everytime I check my email. It seemed like I was supposed to start with "anchors".

I had a doctor's appointment today. Afterwards we were going to the Oriental Market to buy something for friends we were going to visit. I knew that we would pass a fish and chips place Paul and the kids had talked about so I looked for it. I was surprised but not shocked to see that it was named Anchor's Fish and Chips. Sooo God. It seemed to confirm that I was supposed to write about anchors.

Friday, 2/24

Yesterday and today I saw 2 news stories about TV news anchors. I felt I had come full circle. The first time I felt that anchors were meaningful was when my nephew watched the movie "Anchorman " on New Year's Day in 2007. The next day my devotional reading was about an anchor. The day after that my dad died and an anchor and Hebrews 6:19 came up.

So I better get writing about anchors!

Lois
2/29/12

Our Anchors

After my diagnosis of ALS in 1999, I became aware of more and more coincidences in my life. I thought it was so amazing. I realized that God really was real and that He knew what was going on in my life and He knew what I needed at that moment. He could be involved in my life. I wanted everyone to know about this. I didn't talk to non-believers about my faith so praying for them seemed like a great idea.

After I attended the Walk to Emmaus (an awesome spiritual weekend) in 2000, I asked to be part of our church prayer chain and began to receive the weekly prayer list. When I prayed for those on the list I also prayed for family and friends. I was particularly concerned about my dad who was Buddhist and didn't speak much English.

After I wrote "God, ALS and Prayer" in 2002, I wished my dad could read it. That same year I was invited to participate in the Women's Walk to Emmaus in Gardnerville, Nevada. One of the Spiritual Leaders was Pastor Deb whose husband was the pastor of the Sparks UMC (United Methodist Church). And one of the attendees, referred to as Pilgrims, was Noel who was also from Sparks. Noel kept in touch with me and she and her husband, Claud, even visited me. In 2004 they joined my team for the Walk to Defeat ALS which was in Elk Grove that year. They said that they were staying with Pastor Gary and Deb who had been transferred from Sparks to the Sacramento Japanese UMC. After the ALS walk we invited Noel and Claud to have some lunch that my mom and her friends had prepared for us. They said that Gary's church was having its annual Japanese food bazaar so that's where they were headed. Paul and I thought it would be fun to go there after lunch to see Gary and Deb and buy some food to take home. Paul had met Gary when they were both Pilgrims at the Men's Walk to Emmaus in August 2000. He had also met Deb in 2002 when I met her. My parents and friends also decided to go to the Methodist church for food since it was so close to Elk Grove. My mom and her friends used to go to all of the Japanese food bazaars in the Sacramento area so they had been there before. We were able to visit awhile with Gary and Deb and introduced them to the kids and my parents. Gary said that he was the first non-Japanese pastor at the church.

I asked Deb if she knew anyone who might be interested in translating my essay into Japanese. She said she would look into it for me. Later she emailed me that a woman in the church would translate it for me. I was pretty excited. Deb told me that the woman was a professor at UC Davis.

She contacted me herself to apologize that she was busy with school and had to stop working on the translation for a while. Later she let me know she had carpal tunnel and someone else would finish the translation. I didn't care how long it took. I was in awe that someone was willing and able to translate it for me. In December 2005 I received a copy of my essay in Japanese in the mail. It was too incredible! I found out later that the professor taught Japanese at the university. Of course! God is so good! I gave a copy to my dad and my uncle and aunt.

I thought about all that was involved and how God was the only one who could coordinate it all. Because Pastor Ray came to Newcastle, I went to the Walk to Emmaus in March 2000. If I didn't have ALS, I would not have gone on the Walk or written the essay. Because I went on the Walk, Paul went in August where he met Pastor Gary. I met his wife, Deb, and Noel 2 years later.

Pastor Gary was transferred to the Sacramento Japanese UMC. Noel and her husband went on the ALS Walk and stayed with their former pastor. Paul and I went to see Pastor Gary and Deb because of their church food bazaar and I asked her if she knew anyone who would translate my essay into Japanese. A university professor who taught Japanese attended her church and agreed to translate it. A year later my dad was able to read my essay in Japanese. What a miracle! I asked Mom later to ask Dad if he had read my essay and how he liked it. He nodded his head and said "good". That was it. I felt I had done my part.

My parents always came to our house on Christmas Eve for dinner. Afterwards Paul, Travis, Tara, and I went to our church Candlelight Service. Mom started going with us but Dad stayed home. In 2005 Dad decided to go with us. We were all in the van but it wouldn't start. There wasn't enough time to get me into the other van and a manual wheelchair so I decided to stay home. Mom didn't want to leave me home alone, and of course, Dad didn't want to go without her. Paul and the kids went but I was disappointed that Dad had wanted to go for the first time and the van didn't work. But the van often had problems at critical times like that so I was not surprised.

The weekend of December 2, 2006 my brother, Steve and his family invited Mom, her friends, and my family to a performance of the Singing Christmas Tree at their church, Capital Christian Center. Travis had to work so Dad decided to take his place. At the end of the performance Pastor Cole said a prayer for those who wanted to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. I thought about Mom and Dad. I wondered if Dad understood

what the nativity scene was about.

On Monday my caregiver took me to Jericho Coffee. It was a new coffee shop in Roseville that belonged to a couple Paul and I knew from the Walk to Emmaus. Sheri and I were Pilgrims at the same Walk. Sheri was working on the New York Times crossword puzzle in the newspaper when there weren't any customers. She asked if we knew an author named "Ferber" so I said "Edna ". Then she asked if I knew a 3-letter word for "smothers". I said "Tom ". When a customer arrived she placed the paper on the table and asked me to see if I knew any more answers. I noticed that the first word across was "Lois". The first word going down under my name was "Edna ". That caught my attention because it's Mom's English name. As I pondered that, Sheri returned and asked if there was a coach Landry with a first name of "Tom". So I said "yes, a football coach for the Dallas Cowboys". When she left again, I was surprised to see the top of the crossword puzzle. It read "Lois way fish ". The fish symbol was used by early Christians. It seemed like God was telling me that Jesus was the way and that I was on the right path. I was amazed. Sheri had told me earlier that they had wanted to name the store Holy Ground but the marketing consultant advised against it. It was Holy Ground to me. I thought about our names and the puzzle all day. Then that night it hit me. Dad's English name is Tom! I was so focused on Lois and Edna that I missed it even though Sheri had mentioned it twice. I was more used to his Japanese name so I didn't make the connection.

On Sunday Steve called to say he had just found out that Dad was working outside and had fallen off a ladder on Thursday, the 7th. Dad said he was fine and didn't go to ER. Steve did take him to see a doctor and she didn't notice anything at the time. However, Dad's condition declined and it was obvious that he had suffered some brain damage. When he was admitted to a nursing home I asked for prayers for his salvation at our Sunday worship service. A few days later my caregiver was getting me dressed and ready to drive me to see Dad when Pastor David called. I was surprised when he said he was on the way to Woodland to see my dad. It's an hour drive from Newcastle. We said that we were going to see him too. When we arrived at my dad's room I was also surprised to see Steve and his kids. Mom and a friend were there but I expected that. Pastor David asked if he could say a prayer before he left and had us form a circle around Dad's bed and hold hands. I was at the foot of the bed and heard someone using the adjoining bathroom. It was distracting and I really had to focus on what Pastor David was saying. I was so thankful that he could lead us in prayer. Mom and Dad

were the only non-Christians there. After Pastor David left, Steve asked me who he was. I thought he had been introduced. When I said he was our pastor at Newcastle UMC, he said that explained why he was so good at praying. He said it was really nice of him to come to see Dad. I certainly agreed.

I wondered if Dad recognized Pastor David. A year or two earlier my parents were at my house the day before Thanksgiving. Pastor David, his wife and some friends who were visiting them, came to our house that night and sang some hymns in English and Korean. It was a beautiful and touching gift. They left right after singing because they had other homes to go to. My parents were surprised that he was our pastor and had come to our house unexpectedly to serenade us. We were all very impressed.

We had a family tradition of spending January 1, New Year's Day in Woodland with Mom and Dad. It's a big Japanese holiday and Mom cooked special foods. We always tried to start the new year together. Steve and Travis brought Dad from the nursing home so we could celebrate with him. His memory was not good but it was great having him home. I remember that my nephew Josh had received the movie "The Anchorman " for Christmas so he and the other grandkids watched it. I don't care for Will Ferrell so I wasn't really paying attention to the movie.

The next day I read "The Women of Faith Daily Devotional". It was about anchors. Most of the daily readings are funny and easy to understand but not this one. I really didn't get it and didn't feel like figuring it out. I thought about the movie and an anchorman. If God was trying to tell me something, I didn't know what it was.

On Wednesday morning, January 3, 2007 my dad died. Paul, Travis, Tara, and I were on our way to Woodland as soon as we heard. We were on the freeway near Penryn when I noticed a white delivery truck with a large blue anchor painted on the back in the lane to the right of us. The company name, Anchor Vending, was above it. I stared at that large blue anchor and thought it was interesting that an anchor was on the back of a truck after I was thinking about anchors. Paul began to pass the truck and I was stunned at what I saw on the side of the truck!!! Below another blue anchor was "Hebrews 6:19". I could not believe it. I'd never seen a Bible book, chapter and verse painted on a vehicle before. It was too bizarre. I wondered if it was the same verse that I had read the day before. Again I felt that God was telling me something but I didn't know what it was. I was deep in thought

when I heard the words "my father died this morning... there's so much I wanted to tell him ". I couldn't believe what I heard. It was from a song playing on the radio. The music was familiar but I couldn't quite place it. I hadn't heard it on the Christian radio station, the Fish 103.9, before, and I didn't think it was a Christian song. I remembered it from my past. I listened attentively to make sure I had heard correctly. Yes, it was about my father dying in the morning. I began to cry. God was telling me that He knew. He used an anchor on a truck and a song on the radio to talk to me. I was numb. It was exciting and yet unreal. I certainly didn't know why it was happening. I didn't understand why God was doing this for me.

When we arrived at Alderson's Convalescent Hospital Mom met us and told us that the man from the mortuary had waited for us. I was so glad that we were able to see Dad one last time. I felt that he was at peace and that gave me peace. We all headed back to my parents' house. In the driveway I could not contain myself and told my sister-in-law, Glenda, and others about the anchor and verse on the truck. I thought Glenda might be familiar with that Bible verse. She wasn't and said that she didn't have her Bible with her. Then I remembered that I had a small New Testament Bible in the van. I had put it in a pocket in the back of the passenger's seat so I had something to read when I stayed in the van (in my wheelchair). It was from Mom but she thought it was a Precious Moments notepad in a ceramic holder. She had no idea it was a small Bible when she bought it and when she gave it to me. Glenda collects Precious Moments pieces so I was surprised Mom had given it to me. But God knew I would need it. We looked up Hebrews 6:19. It said "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain." I really didn't understand what that meant. I told everyone the devotion I had read the day before was about anchors and I wondered if it was the same verse. I also wondered if anyone else had seen the truck with the blue anchor and Travis said he had.

When we got home that night Tara helped me look at the January 2 devotion. It was indeed Hebrews 6:19. It was written by Sheila Walsh and titled "Anchored". She asks "What is this hope the writer to the Hebrews is speaking of? It is the hope that when God gives his word, he cannot lie. " She also explains that in the Old Testament, people couldn't enter the inner sanctuary of the temple where God was present. However, hope can.

Bible verses often have different meanings to the reader. I felt that God was telling me that He had heard everyone's prayers for Dad/Jichan (grandfather) and that we had received what we prayed for. He kept His

promise.

It's a Buddhist tradition to have a 7-week memorial to remember the person who died. We had a graveside service since the urn with Dad's ashes was ready for burial. During the service I noticed a black cat walking on the road that bordered the cemetery. I know it sounds strange but I felt that Dad was in a safe place. We left the cemetery and went to the Buddhist Church for a short service in the small chapel. Steve told the Reverend that the incense might bother me so he used it sparingly during the service. I was watching the incense rise straight up while he was chanting at the end of the service. Then I looked at the photo of my dad on the altar. I asked him if he was in Heaven and if he had met Jesus. The white flowers in the vase on the altar moved! I felt that Dad was saying "yes ". Had I imagined that the flowers had moved? I checked for air movement but the incense was still rising up. I found out afterwards that others also noticed that the flowers had moved.

For months I thought about all that had happened. It was so incredible. I didn't know of anyone else who had experienced what I had. At times it seemed surreal. Several months after Dad died, the creator of the New York Times crossword puzzles was on the Oprah Show. Seeing the man who had created that crossword puzzle with our names made it more realistic to me. He explained that the easiest puzzles are in the beginning of the week. I wanted to tell him how God had used him to speak to me. Perhaps someday.

I also thought about the song I'd heard the day Dad died. What was that song? I receive the small devotional booklet "Our Daily Bread" in the mail. On November 23, 2009 the reading was titled "Preventing Regret". The writer started out with a story about a British rock band in the late 80's called Mike and the Mechanics and their powerful song "The Living Years". The song was about how the songwriter mourned his father's death and because of their strained relationship there were things he didn't get to say. The reading included some of the lyrics and I knew that was the song I had heard the day my dad died. My caregiver, Marion, was sure I knew the song and hummed it for me. But I really recognized it when Paul found it on the internet and played it for me. Here are some of the lyrics: "I wasn't there that morning when my father passed away. I didn't get to tell him all the things I had to say... I wish I could have told him in the living years ". Unlike the songwriter, I didn't have a strained relationship with my dad, however, I wished that I could have talked to him about my faith. I believe God was

letting me know that my dad knew about my faith through the essay. I didn't have to feel bad.

I didn't notice any more coincidences after that. But every January 2 or 3 since my dad's death, I read that devotional about the anchor. I can't say that I fully understood it but I felt dad was with God and it gave me peace.

On the first Wednesday of January in 2011 Paul brought home a beautiful quilt, Cordy, a member of our church had made. She is a professional quilter and wrote a note about the quilt. She had used fabrics with a Japanese design and each block had a crane. I couldn't believe it! My dad liked cranes, "tsuru" in Japanese. He had died on the first Wednesday in January so I felt like that this was a message. God had used Cordy with her gorgeous labor of love. What a precious gift! I really am surrounded by angels.

Dad taught me how to make the Japanese origami cranes when I was a child. Mine were never as good as his. When Tara was interested in making the cranes, he made some with her, too. I noticed that he was very meticulous and precise with his folds. His points were perfect. I think quilting requires that same kind of precision. He would have appreciated this beautiful quilt and the skills it took to make it.

In the past year my caregivers and I haven't been reading the devotional books every morning as we had in the past. Truth be told, I was talking so much in the morning we would get out of the bathroom after noon. (I am difficult to understand, however those with me everyday still understand me.) But on December 22, 2011 Marion had time to read before she had lunch. I have a lot of books so she selects 3 or so to read. She chose "Streams in the Desert " which she hadn't picked in ages. It was about Abraham and a 'thick and dreary darkness" that consumed him and how we have probably felt the same sorrow. She read "May we realize that 'we have this hope as an anchor for our soul, firm and secure and that it enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain. Hebrews 6:19'. " I had not read that day's devotion since my dad died so it gave me pause. All of the years I had read it before, the verse had no personal meaning to me but this time it did. The writer continued to say we may cry out as Gideon did, "If the Lord is real, why is all of this happening to me? Judges 6:13". But the writer explained that God allows these difficult times to draw us closer to Him. I thought about a good friend who is going through a difficult time and has been in my prayers for several years. It was his birthday.

On Tuesday, January 3, 2012 Tara was home so I asked her to record Tim Allen's new sitcom Last Man Standing. I like his humor. We usually watched crime shows so I hadn't seen his new show yet. I watched the recorded show on Wednesday afternoon when my caregiver left. Tim Allen's character is a Marketing Manager at the Outdoor Man, a store in Colorado. He's married and has 3 daughters. In this episode he is coerced into having a popular young punk-rock style professional bass fisherman over for dinner. They talk about fishing trips and Tim says fishing in Kenya was the best day of his life. Of course, his wife has comments about that. When the young guy invites him to go with him to Kenya in June, Tim says that he can't because he has an anchor. That upsets his wife. As he tries to explain why an anchor is a good thing, he digs himself into a bigger and deeper hole. I thought it was pretty funny. But an anchor had come up again when I was thinking about Dad. It was the anniversary of his death. I felt that it was for someone else, too. It's amazing how God touched 2 of us with that show. The episode was called Moon Over Kenya.

On February 14, 2012 I asked Marion to leave early so she could go to Newcastle Produce for me on her way home and buy some scones for Paul for Valentine's Day. We had told him there would be something for him to pick up on the way home. Since she left earlier than usual, I saw the 1-hour recording of The Chew and when it was over Tivo eventually returned to live TV. I saw the last few minutes of the Nate Show which I hadn't seen in months. In the segment called House Proud a young woman showed off her New York apartment decorated with anchors. She had painted a small one black, hung it on the wall and used it as a coat rack. Hmmm. Anchors again. Later that night Steve called to let us know that our uncle was in poor health. He is my mom's older brother and he and his wife live in the Bay Area and are the only relatives we have in the USA. We usually call him Uncle and Uncle Harry around the kids. The next day I was watching Jeopardy, of course, when the following clue came up. "The popular Japanese drink Hajime is this type of beverage." The answer is tea. But I was in shock. My uncle's Japanese name is, you guessed it, Hajime! It was just too bizarre! What are the odds of his name coming up on Jeopardy? I remembered the anchors in the woman's apartment and felt that God was telling me something. Uncle is also Buddhist and had read my essay in Japanese. He enjoyed fishing when he was healthier and younger. He is in his 90s now. Mom had told us that his name meant "first". I Googled "Hajime tea" and found its history interesting.

As you know from my email "Nudged to Write", I have been quite reluctant

to write about these coincidences. When I asked God if there was something I should give up for Lent, "stop procrastinating " popped into my head and I decided that every time I checked my email I would work on my essay. The next day, February 22 was Ash Wednesday, the beginning of Lent. It began a bit ominously because Rebecca overslept and had an hour to get me ready before Paul came home to take me to my doctor's appointment. She did it though. Paul and I left the house early and we were close to the hospital when Paul got a speeding ticket. We were still early for my appointment so everything was okay. My appointment was just to replace the feeding tube I got in November. I had the previous one for over 3 years but this one had a leak in the small balloon that keeps the feeding tube in place. The new doctor didn't check for leaks in November when she put it in. Replacement is an easy, painless and fast procedure but it ended up being a fiasco. She had the audacity to tell us that it was new and couldn't be leaking. She sent Paul out of the area. She didn't tell us that the size I needed was backordered and that she was putting in a different size. (Everything's fine now. I have a different doctor.) After my appointment I saw a place named Anchor's Fish and Chips and I felt God was speaking to me. I was supposed to type an essay about anchors during Lent. Later on I realized that the elderly couple we were going to visit and their daughter had been in my prayers for years.

On March 8 Paul and I were watching a TV show called Person of Interest. We use the closed captions feature on our TV because we just don't hear as well as we used to and the pets are noisy. The TV screen went gray and the last words the police officer said during the show were frozen on the screen: "I'm helping you stay alive!" I knew that it was a message to me and I thanked God. In 2002 I felt God had told me that He was healing me. That sounds better to me. But either way, it's a miracle that I'm still alive!

Since I've been typing this more coincidences have occurred. I wanted to make sure I spelled "Landry " correctly and that he was the Dallas Cowboys coach so I Googled him. A few days later a Jeopardy category about major cities included a clue about Tom Landry and the answer was "Dallas". I had already written about the crossword puzzle on March 13 when Jeopardy had a category called "Women authors". The clue was "Ferber and St. Vincent Millay" and the answer was "Edna ". A couple of categories over was "Comic Duos" and as I expected Tom Smothers came up.

I didn't have Sheri's email address. When I saw a newsletter from Jericho

Coffee on the other PC, I had my caregiver send an e-mail to Jericho Coffee asking if I could use Sheri's name in my essay. The day she replied, Jeopardy had a contestant who said that she worked on the New York Times crossword puzzles since she was 14 years old. Alex Trebek commented that they became more difficult as the week progressed. She said it took her 2 minutes to compete Monday's puzzle. And I thought I was so smart because I knew some of those answers at Jericho Coffee. I think God was letting me know how much His hands were all over that puzzle and that I was supposed to write about it.

I also remembered that Dad liked jigsaw puzzles. We would find the most challenging ones that were sold. Some were one color. Others had the same shaped pieces and others had a picture on one side and the same picture on the other side in a different direction. He also liked the ones where he had to figure out how to remove a bead or ring from a rope or piece of wood. The only one he could not complete was the Rubik's cube. Even though he didn't do crossword puzzles, it seemed appropriate.

On Monday, March 26 Rebecca and I were talking about the name "Travis". I told her that my maiden name is Takimoto. When my dad was farming tomatoes, some of the men called him Tak. Steve was called Big Tak since he was taller but his friends called him Tak or Taki. A couple of my high school friends called me Taki. When I was pregnant I thought it would be clever if our kids had the initials T.A.K. There was an engineer at work named Travis so Paul and I decided on it if we had a boy. We wanted the kids to have Japanese middle names and Akira Kurasawa was a well-known movie director so we decided on Akira for a boy. I didn't mention Kurasawa to Rebecca because I didn't think she would know who he was.

Later that day we watched part of an old 1981 movie called "Peter and Paul" starring Anthony Hopkins. As we watched, Peter's words about being "fishers of men" caught my attention. When I watched Jeopardy that night, "Akira Kurasawa" came up in one of the clues. "Peter and Paul" also came up but it wasn't related to the Bible. I wasn't shocked. I thought about being a fisher of men and realized "fish" is a noun and a verb. I was thinking of it as a noun in the crossword puzzle. In that instant a commercial for a large white ceramic vase in the shape of a fish appeared on TV. It reminded me of a decorative metal fish Paul and I had purchased years ago from a Japanese store for my dad. Dad liked to fish and eat fish so fish had multiple meanings for me.

Friday, March 30 I was reading the introduction to my 2nd essay, "Sharing Experiences" which I wrote in 2003. I had written that my job was just to sow the seed. It was a great reminder. When I was finished reading, Rebecca sat next to me and read from "The Upper Room". The day's devotion was titled "Planting Seeds ". I smiled. He was telling me AGAIN what I was supposed to do. He is very patient.

I like to understand what's going on. However, I can't explain what I've been experiencing. But that's the point. God knows and that is all that matters. He is in control and knows what I need and when. He always sends angels to help me. A very special one is Paul. He has stayed by me for better or for worse. He cares for me everyday but quietly works in the background rarely making it into my essays. I would not be writing this without his love and help. God bless him.

My other angels come and go. I lost contact with several when I stopped typing in 2004. Pastor Ray transferred to another church and then I heard that he retired. I was delighted to see him and his wife at a beautiful wedding in October. I have reconnected with him. He sent me an email explaining that anchors were a common Christian symbol. Early Christians used it to identify themselves to other Christians. I didn't know that. I only knew about the fish symbol.

I lost contact with Pastor Gary and Deb too. They were transferred to another church but I also reconnected with them. Deb sent me an email recently saying they retired last year and moved to a small town west of Sacramento called Woodland. I smiled. She also forwarded a photo of a ship with 2 anchors from "Sight Psalms". The Reflection was: "God's unconditional love anchors us in the high waves and stormy gales of our lives."

I studied Sheila Walsh's devotion "Anchored" recently. I remembered that when Jesus died, there was an earthquake and the curtain was torn in half. It signified that God is no longer confined to the inner sanctuary where the high priest was the only one who entered once a year. We can be in God's presence all the time. Hebrews 6:20 says that Jesus went before us into the inner sanctuary. (You can use Google for more information. Isn't technology great?) Matthew 7:7 tells us to ask and it'll be given to us, seek and we will find, knock and the door will be opened for us. I have also heard that James said that if you draw near to God, He will draw near to you. It's what God wants us to do.

I know that some of you are non-believers, some of you are spiritual leaders and some of you fall in between. I hope that you enjoyed my essay/testimony. I don't need anymore nudges to write. I will continue writing. I know God's timing is perfect. But now that I'm ready to write about how God has revealed Himself to me, I type by blinking my eyes. It's extremely slow, however I can still type!

I have had more coincidences but you're probably tired of hearing about them. The other night I heard a TV pastor say that we should remove "super" from supernatural so moving mountains and healing the sick is natural for us. Well, messages on TV, books and radio are becoming natural to me.

If you would like to see a great movie about Jesus, I recommend the movie "The Gospel of John." It's part of the Visual Bible series. It's word for word from the Good News Bible. The movies "Matthew" and "Acts" are word for word from the NIV Bible. I love these movies. It's easier than reading the Bible. And seeing Jesus talk to the Pharisees makes me realize why they hated him so much. I hope that they do movies for Mark and Luke. I like the movie "Acts " better than the movie "Peter and Paul ".

Well, since today is Good Friday, I close with my favorite verse. I had to memorize and recite it in Sunday school as a child in an upper room in the Woodland UMC.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world, he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Feel free to share this essay with others.

February 16, 2015 Email Update

From: Lois H
Kawata
Sent: Mon 2/16/15
3:06 PM Subject:
Re: Our Anchors

Hi,

I'm glad that you enjoyed the essay /testimony. God is so good. My concept of reality has sure been turned upside down. Keep looking for those God-incidences. Some people have shared theirs with me. A friend's teenage daughter died in 2000 from a bicycle accident while vacationing with her friend's family. The family was very active in church. They helped counsel students at the high school and church. Many kids accepted Jesus Christ as their Savior because of her daughter's faith and death. My friend said that her daughter loved to lie on her back and watch the sunset (or sunrise) so one day she and her daughter's best friends did that. As they watched the clouds moving they all noticed 2 clouds swirling around. They formed a "C" and a "W", her daughter's initials! They knew she had written them a message in the sky. So beautiful.

I have more questions than answers when it comes to God. When I was writing Our Anchors, I didn't know how to end it. I was so tired of making revisions because I can't just blink on where I want to put cursor. The ending was very abrupt. So I asked God to help me with a better conclusion. The Holy Spirit must have helped me because it ended up being bolder than what I planned. After I emailed it I received a few emails thanking me for sharing my story. A week later I felt a pit in my stomach (is that the right phrase?). I really regretted emailing the essay. I asked myself what I had done. I was more concerned about what people thought of me than what God wanted me to do. The Spirit was gone. A couple of weeks later it occurred to me that the names Edna and Tom from the crossword puzzle came up on Jeopardy when I was writing the essay. But my name Lois had not come up. I wondered why. I was watching Jeopardy at the time. The category Fictional Character's Job came up. Lois Lane came up as a clue and I was so stunned I didn't hear the answer. But I know she was a reporter. I think God is telling me that I just have to write about my God-incidences. Just report the facts. I don't have to worry about a conclusion. That's up to the reader. What a relief. I can do that.

God bless you, Lois

April 10, 2020 Email Update

Sent: 4/10/2020
From: Lois H Kawata
To:
Subject: OUR ANCHORS 2020 Update

September 2018

Hello,

In 2012 I wrote the essay, "Our Anchors" which describes how my first essay, "God, ALS, and Prayer" was translated into Japanese. I was connected to people who could help me in the most amazing way. It was clear to me that God had orchestrated everything. My dad was able to read it before he died in January 2007 which I think was a miracle.

However, having the Japanese translation has been beneficial in other ways, too. I have given copies to family friends who grew up in Japan and preferred reading it in Japanese.

After Dad died we lost contact with his family in Japan. We couldn't communicate in Japanese and they couldn't communicate in English. In August 2017 a young college student in Japan contacted Glenda, my brother's wife, via Facebook. Misaki wrote that she was looking for her mother's cousin, Steve Takimoto. She had found him! She and her Aunt Rumi, her mother's sister, came to visit us in September. It was so wonderful to reconnect with our family in Japan. I gave them a copy of my essay in Japanese and in English.

Steve told Rumi that we had lost contact with our mother's side of the family when Uncle Hajime died in May 2012. She was able to locate them a couple of months ago. Steve has reconnected with them, too. Someday I would like to share my essay with them also. Our small family keeps on growing and the world seems to be getting smaller and smaller. It is fantastic. And, technology has been so helpful. Facebook, email and Google translate are great.

In "Our Anchors" I mentioned that my dad was in Alderson Convalescent Hospital. I didn't write that one time when we were visiting him, we could hear Christmas carolers in the hallway. It reminded me of when I was in

MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship, and we went to Alderson and walked down the hallway singing carols. Hearing the carolers when I was visiting Dad gave me comfort and a reminder of Christmas during a difficult time. I hope we had done the same thing years ago when I was in high school.

Origami, the Japanese art of paper folding, has been something I've enjoyed since I was a child. Origami cranes have always been special to me. When Dad was in Alderson, we hung some from the ceiling so he could see them when he was in bed.

I have a thousand colorful origami cranes hanging from a Japanese parasol in my bedroom. For several years they were hanging in my living room but Paul moved the mobile when ramps were put in the living room. I received the cranes in February 1999, a month after my diagnosis. Travis and other boys in his Pack were graduating from Cub Scouts to Boy Scouts. I was a Den Leader so it was perfect timing for me. At the end of the graduation, I was presented with the beautiful colorful origami cranes. I was speechless and so surprised. I was told that it was a joint effort by the Cub Scout Pack and the Newcastle UMC. Later, Pastor Ray told me that he had said a prayer for me each time he made a crane. I'm sure he made a lot because he is an expert. He used to make cranes instead of doodling. And, he made the smallest ones I had ever seen. I have another story involving origami, but I'm going to save it for another time. Aren't teasers annoying? Lol.

I think you'll notice the differences between what God was doing in my life in the essays, "God, ALS, and Prayer" and "Our Anchors". In 2002 I was aware of coincidences. In 2012 I was aware of what God could do in my life. I knew God was always watching over me and waiting for me to ask Him into my life. He doesn't go where He's not invited. We have to ask, seek and knock. What do we knock on? His door. He has opened the door for me and it is so amazing! I hope my experiences will encourage you to seek God.

Update to Our Anchors, April 2020

Steve, my brother, was going to go to Japan to visit our relatives in March 2019 so I asked him if he would take copies of God, ALS, and Prayer for our cousins on our mom's side of the family. I thought I only had a couple of

copies in Japanese but Nancy, my caregiver, found 5 copies. When Steve came to visit me a few days before his trip, I asked him how many copies he needed. He used his fingers to count the cousins he planned to visit. He said, "5". Wow! What a God-incidence! So I did get to share the essay with Mom's side of the family.

I hope that Our Anchors will be translated into Japanese so they can read it, too. Someday...

Feel free to share this with others.

God bless you,

Lois

SHARING EXPERIENCES (September 2003)

Lois Kawata
P.O. Box 980
Newcastle, CA 95658

E-mail: loiskawata@gmail.com

May 2020 Update to Sharing Experiences

I wrote Sharing Experiences in 2003. But I only emailed it to Christians and good friends. I remember some people were worried about me after reading it so I rarely shared it with others after that.

I wasn't able to read it when I stopped using a computer in 2004. I read it on my speech device/tablet in 2012 and then had problems opening the document for several years. I could only read the introduction which was in the email.

In the summer of 2018 Tara figured out what the problem was and I finally got to read it. I was surprised to see that a lot of what I had written in 2003 was what I was thinking about 15 years later. It made me a little sad to think that I hadn't grown spiritually. But, perhaps I had been given a glimpse of the process I would face in the future. Change is not easy or fast for me.

I don't think it's as much fun to read as God, ALS, and Prayer and Our Anchors but I decided to include it on this website.

Blessings,
Lois

—— Original Message -----

From: Lois Kawata

[September 26, 2003 Introductory Email](#)

Subject: SHARING EXPERIENCES

Hello,

I'm sending you this e-mail because I thought you might enjoy reading some personal experiences of mine. If you know of anyone else who might like it, feel free to forward it to him or her. It's taken me several weeks (months now) to write this so I've included some key dates. I've also included some excerpts from something I read later that affirmed what I had already written (so God).

On July 19, 2003 I felt nudged to write about a spiritual experience I had in January 2002. I was discouraged when someone did not think it was a good idea because I had scared a lot of people then. Last Sunday morning (August 10, 2003) I knew I had to decide if I wanted to be a people pleaser or a God pleaser. I decided that I wouldn't worry about people not understanding or thinking I was crazy. My job was to sow the seed and the rest was up to God. I went to church and the children's story was about sowing seed (Was God speaking to me?). Since our pastor is on leave, a church member presented the Talk he had just given the weekend before... "The Priesthood of all Believers" (I think God's speaking to me). Halfway through, he mentioned me by name and how I was a priest to him and our church (yes, God was speaking to me). I still find it hard to believe that God uses me the way He does. ("It is the work that God does through us that counts, not what we do for Him." August 30 message from "My Utmost for His Highest" by Oswald Chambers.)

On Monday morning Joyce Meyer (TV Bible teacher) said that if we struggle with hearing from God and have doubts it's Him, we need to give the burden back to Him. He will speak to us. He'll use any means possible and keep trying. I realize now, that most of my God-incidents are God speaking to me through songs, other people, reading material, etc., because I don't hear Him myself (or tend to ignore Him).

Since I need help setting the laptop up on my lap I finally started typing Tuesday night and didn't want to quit. Earlier at an Emmaus Reunion meeting, one of my friends asked why I struggled with writing...was it a lack of ideas? I said that one reason was, "It's harder to type now. When I typed 60 wpm I had nothing important to write about. Now it's difficult to type with 2 fingers and I have a lot to write about." By Wednesday night I realized that my problem is "starting". Once I "move" I don't want to shut up, so to speak. I feel that God has bombarded me with insights and life experiences to go with them. A devotional message I read last week was about the verse "I will not die but live to declare the works of God." (Psalm 118:17) I believe Satan (evil forces or negative forces if you're not comfortable with his name) is trying to get rid of me, especially before I tell others how he and God work in my life now. I realize that even if I die, my writing can live on to declare the works of God. Of course, I've told God, given a choice, I'd prefer to be physically healed, but if He wants me Home, so be it.

Several of my devotional readings "spoke" to me today (August 16, 2003). One of them, "My Utmost for His Highest" was about how the Pharisees could run circles around Mary when it came to doctrine, but she had a relationship with Jesus because He had cast demons out of her (I didn't remember that). She didn't recognize Him at the tomb, but knew His voice (His sheep do). It also said we often have a difficult time believing another person's testimony. Then it talked about how Thomas didn't believe the other disciples when they told him they had seen Jesus.

I know I do not know the Bible well. But as I read the Bible, devotional books, or Christian books now, I have often had the same insight or life experience that relates to what I read. I realize that my thoughts are not really mine. They often come from another source...hopefully God. As I read the Bible I am surprised that what I wrote in my testimony "God, ALS and Prayer" applies. I think it was Paul who wrote in his letters that in his weakness he was strong. Also "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). The Bible has come alive to me. I'm not going to be able to type and look through my Bible due to weak arms, hands, and fingers so please forgive me if I misquote verses and don't reference where it's from. I recently sent an e-mail and typed that prayer is the sword of God's armor. I read that passage daily and know the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God so I'm not sure what I was thinking. I was a perfectionist so this is not easy. But, you know or can check Scripture. If you feel my insights are not Scripturally sound, please let me know. (9/26/03 update. Actually, in September we bought a hospital bed table and have it in the living room so my laptop, Bible, and devotional books are on it making everything more accessible. It's a bit too high for typing comfortably but has to be this height for my wheelchair. But it is convenient and easier. I still need to use the PC in my bedroom for e-mail so I hope I can copy and paste this.)

A week ago my neighbor gave me a copy of the Women of Faith daily devotional. It has

some pretty funny messages so I'm reading from the beginning, too. I read the April 11 message today (it's August 18 now) and found it very interesting. Marilyn Meberg wrote that she read about whales in the Encyclopedia Britannica and learned it was possible for a man to be swallowed alive by a whale, survive for up to 3 days, and be vomited out. Once a sailor on a whaling ship had fallen overboard and was lost at sea. Later when the whalers cut open a whale they had harpooned, the man was found unconscious in its belly. He was revived and resumed his duties. I'm glad I can tell people that Jonah being swallowed by a whale is not farfetched. Marilyn closed with the following statement and prayer:

"God has made it perfectly clear that his ways are not our ways, and I'm so glad. My ways are not nearly as inventive or exciting as his.

Lord, enlarge my mind that I may embrace wonders that are larger than my mind. Amen."

Well, I'll let you read my thoughts on pruning. I think that what I am experiencing is unique but perhaps not. I hope it will encourage you to keep moving up the mountain. If you're ahead of me, I can sure use your encouragement. You may want to print it out and find a quiet time to read it.

God bless you,

Lois

Sharing Experiences

I'm feeling that nudge to write again. When I'm feeling spiritual/on the mountaintop, I want to shout or e-mail everyone about the amazing things God does for me. However, when I am not feeling spiritual/in the valley, I begin to have doubts about sharing my experiences. I think the foothills would be ideal. Gee, Newcastle, where I live, is actually in the foothills. So what is my problem? It couldn't possibly be stubbornness and lack of discipline. Jesus talked about pruning the grape branch to bear more fruit. Well, pruning just never ends in my life these days.

I've heard that how much we give God determines how much He can give us. When I asked God to help me in 1999, He first helped alleviate my concern for my children. Mary, the mother of one of my son's classmates (and one of my Cub Scouts) called to say she'd heard of my diagnosis of ALS and offered to help in any way. She told me how God let us care for His children while on earth but they were His children, not ours. He loved them more than we did. She told me He would take care of them no matter what happened to me. What she said helped me so much. I think I released them to God at that time because my worries about dying and leaving them without a mother subsided. That seemed to open the door more to God's help and blessings.

God really began pruning me beginning with the oldest unresolved issues of forgiveness. In the Lord's Prayer we say, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us". Luke 6:37 says "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." That sure explains why He began with forgiveness and continues to teach me about it. I must admit that prior to His pruning, I arrogantly thought I really wasn't a sinner. I figured I didn't kill, steal, commit adultery, tell major lies, etc. When I repeated the various creeds during worship, I'd think asking for forgiveness for my sins didn't apply to me because I wasn't a big sinner. I know...ridiculous. Asking for forgiveness is easier and becoming a daily routine. Now I ask God to forgive me when I'm watching TV when I know He wants me to do something else or when I'm not trusting in Him. I sin or displease Him a lot. I once read that the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that a Christian is a sinner who is saved. That's simple enough for me to understand.

Pride was and still is a major area of pruning. But the progression of ALS certainly forced me to let go of the following sources of pride: my job (analytical mind, problem-solving skills, typing, etc.) physical abilities (skier, bicyclist, coordinated, in tune with my body), independence, self-reliance, success, seemingly perfect life, etc. God also pruned me and is still pruning me in the areas of speech, self-will (stubbornness, impatience, control etc.), perfectionism (worldly not Godly), anger, intolerance, expectations, being right (pride again), discipline, and so on. As the disease progressed, weakening my body and making me more dependent on others to help me, it became easier to be patient, let go of being in control, listen to others, wait for God, etc. ALS actually made pruning easier...I couldn't run away to avoid it, so to speak.

Christians often talk about "dying to self". I once wrote some friends that my "self" refused to die but I wished it would just commit suicide...but that would be too easy. The verse "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21) also appeared in a few of my daily devotional readings during that week of severe pruning of pride. I've

always thought of it as dying and going to Heaven as gain. However, I felt God was telling me something else. I finally realized that dying to self is gain. We have a lot to gain here on earth; we don't have to wait until we are in Heaven. God wants to bless us now while we are living on earth. But many of us aren't receiving all those blessings because we aren't working on dying to self. We don't want to "let go and let God". We think life is fine the way it is. Oh, but I know it can be better when we follow His will.

I've decided that when I hear "die", those are fighting words and I want to make my hands into a fist, raise my arms, and come out swinging. I've read about "surrendering to God" and I like that much better. I can see myself with arms raised up to the sky as I surrender. No, I'm mistaken, that's me with arms raised up to the heavens praising God. Oh, but it's still so hard. I only surrender little by little and when forced to. As a result, God can only bless me little by little.

I believe that pruning those faults of mine, the bad kind of fruit, makes more room for the Fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, patience, peace, goodness, gentleness, kindness, faithfulness, and self-control). I'm not gentle and don't have self-control yet so I know there's still a lot more pruning ahead. Sigh. At times I don't want to be pruned anymore. I am so tired of it. Why can't He prune the other person? I whine and complain that it's so hard. Then I'm reminded that my options are limited...pruning or actual death. I believe God's pruning is slowing the progression of ALS and keeping me alive. I feel that the stronger the Holy Spirit becomes the more I'm filled with His fruit. As a result, He can help me more with my mind, emotions, will, and body.

So many of my friends have died from ALS. I have wondered why I am still alive. My willingness to be pruned and to try to follow God's will seems to be the difference. I don't think they experienced the peace I had early on either. One Christian friend traveled around the world in search of a cure. He became depressed when the disease continued to progress. The day his doctor told him he needed to order a wheelchair, he died. At the memorial service of another friend, I learned she had been an active member of the church for 30 years. I later learned she was angry with God for having ALS. A friend of mine commented, "she didn't see God in her having ALS." I was fortunate to see God in my having ALS rather early. I didn't go through the typical phases of anger or depression. I've also learned that life is about living for God, not for oneself, or one's family. He has a purpose for my life and I'm working on fulfilling it even though I don't know what it is yet.

I've also noticed that what I was most proud of, what I considered were my strengths, were what kept me from getting close to God. I consider myself an analytic. Joyce Meyer often talks about how we keep our minds busy with reasoning. She calls it "paralysis of analysis". Yes, that's what I did. Being an analytic I also dealt with facts and my mind had doubts about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Bible. Belief finally came from my heart and spirit, not my mind. As the Holy Spirit grows, my mind believes more, and I know that what is in the Bible is true. I'm listening to the Bible on CD and follow along in my Bible almost daily now. I love it. I just read the book of Isaiah (I'll have to go back and study it) and have been amazed at how I can actually relate to the Old Testament. Many of the thoughts and insights I feel are from God are already in the Bible. You probably already knew that's how God works. He helps me understand how the Bible relates to my life. I'm living it. I finally "get it". While my analytical mind kept me from

God before, now it helps me grow closer to Him. I analyze my life experiences, Bible or devotional readings, and what I believe are insights from God. He makes it all relate and come together. Once I let “analyzing” go, and gave it to God, He gave it back to me to be used for His glory.

My physical abilities kept me too busy to focus on God. Now those very biking and cross-country skiing experiences remind me that living with ALS is a similar experience. Paul and I did the Death Ride (a grueling organized bicycle ride...we only biked up and down 2 of the 6 passes... Monitor Pass and Ebbits Pass) on our tandem bike. Now, we're on a life ride with God in control. The climb up is difficult but if I keep going I'll make it to the top. The feeling is indescribable and the view glorious. When I quit holding on to my physical abilities as the disease progressed, I didn't lose complete use of my muscles. The awareness I have of my body has helped me adapt the way I do things like stand, roll over in bed, or get out of bed so I continue the activity as long as I can. I didn't realize falling down and getting up so often while cross-country skiing would be so helpful. But I also believe the Holy Spirit is helping me as much as he can.

While my inner strength kept me from relying on God before, now with God it keeps me going. I still need pruning in the area of stubbornness but I am stubbornly refusing to give in to Satan. I often remind myself “He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4) Someone once told me that God is healing me 1 nerve at a time. I like that thought.

Well, since 1999 I feel I've been on a spiritual “fast track” or accelerated learning program. God has been busily pruning me and blessing me. If you've read my testimony, “God, ALS, and Prayer”, you know that God reveals Himself to me in amazing ways. St. Teresa wrote that God reveals His power to us gradually in ways we can handle. Songs about angels on the radio were certainly the best angels to comfort me. He is pretty hi-tech these days. But He also showed me how He orchestrates events and revealed more of His power to me through those songs compared to sending a glowing angel who would tell me not to be afraid. ALS is a devastating illness but in my case He clearly showed “and we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

In January 2002 I had a very supernatural spiritual experience that lasted several weeks. It was exciting at first, as I grew closer and closer to God, and reached the mountaintop where I experienced the “peace of God that transcends all understanding.” It was so awesome I want to experience that peace again. When I complain it's too hard to change and want to give up, I remind myself it is worth the pruning. The last 4 days were like a desert-experience and about evil that was not fun or exciting. It was such a bizarre experience it was beyond my understanding and I still haven't been able to write about the entire experience.

Since then God has slowly helped me understand the experience. But He has only been able to give me one puzzle piece at a time because I've only surrendered to Him a little at a time. A few Saturdays ago, July 19, 2003 I thought about that January experience and how things God told me were coming true. The past month I'd been listening to the Old Testament on CD and wondered how people remembered in detail what God told them.

And how did they remember their dreams and visions and know what they meant? I certainly have a problem hearing God, don't usually remember my dreams, and don't know what they mean, if I do remember. Then I recalled a poster at work that I believe went something like this:

Tell a person and they'll know what to do
Show a person and they'll understand what to do.
Help a person and they'll remember what to do.

God is so awesome. In January 2002, He actually helped me experience how to grow closer to Him; let me experience "the peace of God that transcends all understanding"; and let me experience the various ways Satan would try to make me lose my focus on God and thereby lose my peace. It was a surreal experience.

What a revelation! After a year and a half I finally understand the overall experience, especially the 4 days about evil, which were so bizarre I haven't told anyone about certain parts. God gave me the final puzzle piece and I saw the full picture. But applying what I learned is still not easy. And knowing how God works, I'm sure there's more I need to understand about specific events. I read Isaiah 48: 17-18 today and it was perfect. "I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you, who directs you in the way you should go. If only you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have been like a river, your righteousness like the waves of the sea."

What follows is a copy of an e-mail I sent to some friends describing part of my experience. I've made some corrections and taken out some names. After the copy of the e-mail, I've written more about the last 4 days about evil and some recent experiences.

----- Original Message -----

From: Lois Kawata

Sent: Friday, April 12, 2002 5:20 PM

Subj: More Thoughts

Hi,

(Written Sunday, 4/7/02 but saved till now (Friday, 4/12/02 with some revisions. It's really long, of course.)

Yes, I've been thinking again and that certainly means trouble. Sometimes I think I am totally insane or truly blessed. I am hoping it is the latter. When I look back and remember the God-incidences the last few years, it reassures me that I am blessed.

I continue to think about what happened in January and wanted to share my thoughts with you. I feel that you may have a better understanding of it than most of us. And, if it does happen again, you can be prepared for it.

I started to write about the entire experience but so much happened, it will take me awhile to write about all of it in detail. I just made a list of key incidents and it was a very long list. Basically, it did start out with a nudge to write that just got stronger and stronger as devotionals, sermons, TV, and music on the radio supported the nudge. When I finally started writing, it's as if obeying the nudge led me to another level. I seemed to get closer and closer to God. You received e-mails from me as I progressed on the journey. I ended up deleting all the e-mails I sent out so I don't even have a record of what I wrote. I was pretty embarrassed by them and felt I should delete them. I'm not sure if it was my will, God's, or the devil.

The last day I was really close to God (1/25/02 actually Weds. 1/24), I was led step by step to "let go of Paul" so I could put God before Paul. It was like Paul had to die to me. I refused to do it at first. It was very emotional and I remember arguing with God that I couldn't let go of Paul. I cried in bed for a long time, grieving as if he had really died or we had divorced. The music on the radio (FM 105.5, the Fish) helped me on this journey. At first the songs were sentimental and about how God loved me. I felt so undeserving of His love. Then after letting go of Paul and letting all the tears out, the music changed. Upbeat songs praising Him were played and I got out of bed and celebrated how awesome He is. The night before (actually 2 nights) we had caught the end of Ally McBeal on TV and it showed an elderly woman dancing with a walker. It was strange to see in that show but as I danced around praising Him, it was so prophetic. It was really strange how I was led through the entire process. It was all an emotional/mental process that seemed insignificant but it **CHANGED EVERYTHING**. As I stood up and rejoiced I felt I had moved up a level closer to God. I sensed the devil would try to attack me through Paul but he could not hurt Paul although he might try to do something minor to Paul.

During the week I felt that God was teaching me by taking me through something and after I went through it, I understood what He was teaching me. It was like a lesson and finding out what the answer was after I passed. I also got the dry heaves/gagging afterwards. It was like exorcising the evil that was in me. I felt it was to help me heal physically and to rid my

body of ALS. It seems strange now but I remember feeling thankful at the time.

Then, I had to go through the same process of "letting go of Travis and Tara". It wasn't as difficult this time since I knew what to expect but I still cried and grieved for them, and later celebrated and praised God. Again, I sensed the devil would try to get to me by attacking the kids, but that he could not really harm them because I had let go of them and loved God more than them. Nothing really changed, I still loved Paul and the kids, but somehow through that process I had transitioned to loving God more than them. Actually nothing changed but EVERYTHING had changed. It's really hard to explain, but perhaps you've gone through it too. Somehow I loved God more through the process but I don't know how it happened.

Then, I realized I had to "die to self" last, but figured I now knew the routine. As I lay in bed and cried, I thought I was going to die at any moment. Yes, I really thought I was going to die and I was okay with it. I hadn't changed physically so there was no physical reason for thinking I would die. For some reason I thought the house was going to suddenly go up in flames with all the material things that were important to me. But, something didn't feel right to me and I felt there was something more God wanted me to do. I wasn't going to die yet. I got out of bed and lit some candles I had on the dresser from the time Paul and I prayed for Rita. There was also a metal art piece of a church with a crystal in it that my mom had given me so I started arranging the candles around it. Then I walked to the living room and grabbed the expanded family portrait, angel bears, and special things people had given me (it's amazing what fits in the pouch of my walker) and arranged them around the candles. I had the Stephen Minister bear, ALS stuff (including an angel candle a mom of a PALS, person with ALS, had given me at the Mandarin festival 2 years ago. I had lit it once when her son died but did not burn it long since burning it would make the angel disappear. I lit it this time for all the PALS I knew that had died. I have sensed them cheering me on from Heaven), grammar school photos which just happened to be on the floor, a golf ball from a person with ALS who died fell to the ground and I felt it was a message, and a wood sculpture of praying hands and a cross (the clock fell out and I felt it was a message). Then the grieving really started. I was ready to give up everything, everyone I loved and my own life. I even wrote "love letters" to everyone I cared for as I sobbed uncontrollably. I even wrote one to the childhood friend I had finally forgiven after 48 years, thanking her for all that I had learned through that experience (I kissed her grammar school picture). I was honestly ready to die and truly felt I was going to die. I did not at all feel suicidal (I want to make it clear that I never thought of harming myself or others...I was so filled with love for God). I felt that God was going to take me somehow. I was not scared or worried about the rest of the family at all but I did kiss their photos. I was totally focused on giving up my life for God. He was all I cared about. It was all very peaceful. It's hard to explain or even understand now.

I had lost all track of time through this entire process but remembered that a friend wanted to visit that Wednesday and was going to bring Tara home. She'd never done that so I felt God knew I was going to die so He made sure Tara did not come home alone that day (Travis stayed at school for basketball practice everyday). I thought He was awesome in how He had Tara with M. S., that day of all days.

I was shocked when there was a knock on the door and M., Tara, E., and another classmate

were at the door. I usually unlock the door when the kids are due home but hadn't thought of it that day. I was so surprised I didn't die. It did turn out that Tara's teacher singled her out to be reprimanded that day. That had never happened before and the girls said Tara didn't even do anything. It was as if what God told me came true. The devil tried to attack me through Tara but all he could do was have the teacher reprimand her. And it was perfect that M. could console the girls about the incident since most of Tara's friends were reprimanded. I was not at all surprised someone had tried to harm Tara and her Christian friends.

Well, after that more thoughts about God came to me and I really felt I needed to write about it. But, I started to lose my focus on God. I still trusted God, but I was distracted now by Paul as he started to get involved in what I was doing on the PC. He had ignored me and even avoided talking to me for over a week so it was suddenly a surprise how he started to act. Things did get bizarre after this. I didn't focus on God like I should have but I learned how the devil and evil works. God told me not to acknowledge the evil so I did not "rebuke it" and it was allowed to do as it wanted. God told me no harm would come to Paul, the kids, or me. I know it sounds really crazy but I learned so much by letting evil do its thing for the next few days. I believe it was a really big lesson for me that I would not have learned if I had rebuked the devil. It helps to know the enemy when one goes into battle against him. I learned what the devil is capable of and how he works, so I am better prepared for the attack. I remember that the book "Prayer of Jabez" addresses this. I do agree that as one gets closer to God, the devil doesn't like it and starts to attack.

I did panic, and was afraid because I lost my focus on God and the devil was able to play with my mind. I never lost my trust in God but I did let the devil get to me and things got very bizarre and chaotic. I realize I let Paul's actions make me act irrational and crazy. I felt betrayed and alone when I was forced to hurry to make a doctor's appointment and saw I was actually taken to ER (no appt. like they said) at Kaiser by Paul and 3 friends. I had initially called a friend to help me, but it all backfired on me. Even now I am embarrassed by what happened but I do feel that God turned it all into a very good lesson on good vs. evil and what happens when we don't focus on Him.

I have shared a lot of what happened with Paul and it is beyond his understanding. He admits that he was scared and worried and was praying that I "snap out of it". I was praying that God would help him understand that the devil was using his stubbornness and lack of understanding to get to me. When I was at ER, the message I got from God was that Paul and my friends loved and cared for me too much. The devil was using that so they were not focusing on God and trusting Him.

At times I still wonder if I got it all wrong and was being led by the devil. But since I still trusted God and was usually in a calm, peaceful, and loving state, after I overcame some bouts of panic/fear, I still think it was a "God thing".

There were some interesting things that happened at ER, too, so I do believe God was always in control. I continue to get pieces of information that help me understand what happened. The part about evil is difficult for me to understand but I really learned a lot about evil. It is very real. I'm not ready to write about it yet but I saw some strange things and was not scared (hard to believe when I think about it). I know God was watching over

me and knew I would not be harmed.

Well, finally I wanted to share how difficult it is to have ALS and still believe all things are possible with God. At times I feel I will be physically healed, then I think I must be crazy. Then I go to Forbes Norris MDS/ALS Center and want to tell them how God is working in my life, but chicken out since they feel it's all a chemical imbalance. They are trying to figure out what to do so I don't have another episode like I had in January. They want me on anti-depressants or Marinol (a depressant). I feel I've never been more mentally or emotionally healthy. I don't think they know what to do for me since they are used to prescribing drugs.

The past few months what I have been learning is that I need to focus on God and not expect answers or understanding from others. God has me in a special place isolated from others so He can change me and teach me. I focus on Him better when not distracted by others. As I read the Bible it is amazing how what I have learned through my own experiences and analyzing them are already in the Bible. In many cases stories I had read or heard before take on a totally different meaning to me as I read them now. I was led to read about Elisha this week 3 times and the story about the woman and jars of oil had significance.

Today you talked about the Spirit growing and I sure feel mine is growing. It was shriveled up and it has been rejuvenated. I want to warn you that I hope I have a 3rd mountain top experience someday. I hope to handle it better next time, though, but it seems each time it is more intense. In January there was a time when I was so filled with the Spirit, "I was definitely out of God's way". It was totally awesome and I want to experience it again. No wonder Jesus was so loving and calm, if that's how He was all the time. And, no wonder He suffered when He took our sins and was separated from God. Life is certainly not easy for us humans.

Well, I didn't send this to you for advice or for your understanding. But, I just wanted to share what is going on with me. I am trying to listen to God more so if I do some strange things like giving up eating, don't be alarmed...

I feel I am in uncharted territory and God is telling me to trust Him. I'm trying.

Of course, I ALWAYS welcome your words of wisdom. God really uses you. Thank you for being such a blessing to me.

God bless you.

Lois

Isn't our God awesome?

In another e-mail I wrote about the climax of that day I "died to self". That evening I wanted to tell Paul about the events of the day but he didn't want to hear about it. Normally I would have gotten angry or felt hurt and cried. But I understood why he was acting the way he was and had compassion for him. I didn't have to tell myself to keep my mouth shut or to control myself. I was in a total state of peace with no self-effort. I couldn't even feel pride because I knew I had nothing to do with it. It was the Holy Spirit. I was like an observer and was in awe of the peace I felt. I realized it was the "peace of God that transcends all understanding". It was so awesome.

The next day, Thursday, was the start of my desert experience. Some of the lessons I learned the last 4 days were: Satan may use my family, friends, doctors, spiritual leaders, my fears and weaknesses, etc. in various ways to make me lose my peace and faith in God. He doesn't want me to have the Fruit of the Spirit and to be close to God. But God is always in control so I need to stay focused on God and do as He says, stay in peace, pray, and read the Bible.

During that experience I heard God clearly and obeying Him was easy. I guess that happens when we are filled with the Spirit. The Kaiser Chaplain reminded me of a Pharisee since he kept quoting scripture and didn't really talk to me. I used my speech device to tell him God wanted to speak to him but he ignored me. I asked God often if He really wanted me to type what He said. God told the Chaplain to ask Him anything. I really wanted to hear God's answer (I also felt I could then tell if I was talking to myself or if it really was God talking to me). God repeatedly told him to close his Bible. I know he thought I was crazy but he should have tried to relate to me instead of showing off his Bible knowledge. It just occurred to me that he might have thought I was possessed. Paul and I knew he wasn't helping me, so Paul asked the Chaplain to leave the area with him. Yes, it was quiet behind the curtains as other patients listened to what I typed on my speech machine. I was so filled with the Holy Spirit I did what God told me to do when I was focused on Him. I didn't care what people thought of me.

My body may be diseased but God had power over it. It took 3 people 5 attempts to draw blood from my artery. All 3 said my right wrist artery was obvious but they couldn't draw blood. A blood gas is supposed to hurt but it didn't at all. God told me to trust Him. Because of the delay, we were still in ER when my brother's wife returned my call. I wanted my family to know where I was. I realize now that Satan can only do what God allows and it passes by God first.

One morning God woke me up at 3 AM and told me my feeding tube was all plugged up. He told me not to wake Paul up and to quietly go to the dining room table. I took the feeding tube out of the toddler sock I had it coiled in and sure enough the entire foot long tube was filled with solidified nutrient. That never happened before or again. With my weak hands and fingers it was quite a job and took a long time to unplug it. Paul never did wake up. I know that God was in control of that entire January experience.

I attended BSF (Bible Study Fellowship) recently and when we were studying John 15, the lecturer referred to a book I knew was The Vine by Bruce Wilkinson. I was amazed to read

that God also told the author to let go of his kids and wife. I had hoped I had done that in January 2002 but recently realized it didn't count. Wilkinson struggled the most with letting go of his kids. I wondered why it wasn't the same with me and remembered I had already let go of them when I was first diagnosed. If I hadn't, I think I would be depressed or angry because I can't be the mom to them I want to be because of ALS. I've given them to God, although I still get in His way a lot.

What I experienced in January 2002 helps me with my life now. My family is living that experience but I'm the only one who understands the battle that's going on. I can see wonderful changes in Tara and feel she has broken through an invisible barrier. She is the only one who will listen to me when I talk about God. Her grades improved last year, she dresses nicer now, she really helps me, and sometimes she has a way of bringing out a softer side of Travis and Paul. (They still see me as the nagging, critical, controlling wife and mom.) Last year Tara won 2 tickets to Marine World and \$100 for the church. This year she was selected to attend a science camp at Stanford University. At first I told her how proud I was of "her" accomplishments. Then I remembered the pruning God is doing on my pride. I later told her she needed to thank God for all He does for her. God is working in her life.

In July Tara was on a quad with a friend when it flipped over landing on Tara. Her friend broke her jaw but Tara just had a sore shoulder and bruises. A few weeks later Tara went to Sunsplash Waterpark with another friend. On the second ride their inner tube flipped and her friend broke her collarbone. Tara hit her head but was okay. Bruce Wilkinson wrote in his book, The Prayer of Jabez that if everything is going smoothly Satan isn't concerned about you, which isn't good. I think he knows Tara is growing in Christ. I know everyone's prayers protected her. I always pray for our friends so I wish my prayers could have protected her friends more. God often uses Tara to speak to me and I think He's using her to help our family. Paul has had back pain since last September and it's getting worse. Tara has started cooking, helps with shopping, helps me out of bed, helps me in the bathroom, feeds me breakfast, asks if I need anything, and often does things for Travis. On July 18, 2003 I saw a light at the end of the tunnel in regard to our family. God is in control and everything will work out for our good even though we may not agree or understand it. He has a plan and sees the big picture.

As we grow closer to God, He uses rainbows, deer, clouds, etc. to speak to us. He will also orchestrate events for us. Everything will just work out beautifully and we will realize the plan had to begin years ago. Joyce Meyer often says that we usually make plans and then pray for God to make it happen. But we need to pray first and plan later. When I do that, God's plan usually turns out better than what I had planned or even imagined. Several of you have heard the following story but it's the perfect example.

Last year a few friends from my church planned on going to the Women of Faith conference at Arco Arena. I wanted to go but I wasn't walking very well so I decided that if God wanted me to go He would get me there. And He did. He had my angel friends get me a ticket, drive me there, and push my wheelchair. He got my 2 Angel Moms and me front row seats in front of the stage; let me meet the dramatist; and had my favorite speaker, Patsy, sing in front of me during the finale so I could sign "thank you" and she could sign "I love you" back. He also had her standing outside the door I exited so I could

meet her and get a big hug from her. And the day I decided to order the video of the 2002 tour, it went on sale and I saved \$40. And, as if that wasn't enough He made sure the video was taped in Sacramento and Patsy signing "I love you" was on it. I was really blessed.

Here's another example of how God orchestrates events and teaches me. Several months ago a medical column in Joyce Meyer's monthly magazine was about seafood. The author, a doctor, wrote that most shellfish had toxins due to the way they filtered the water to eat, I think (I gave the magazine away so I can't check it). I have heard that an allergic reaction to shellfish is common. The author also wrote that fish that were scavengers also had more toxins since they fed off decayed things. He wrote that when we eat that type of seafood we also add those poisons to our bodies. I think I'm allergic to shark, since I ate shark steaks and got sick both times. I wondered if sharks were scavengers. In June I was listening to the book of Leviticus on CD and following along in my Bible. I was surprised God said to only eat living creatures with fins and scales from the sea and streams. Then, detest creatures without fins or scales from the sea and stream. Hmm, sharks don't have scales.

Father's Day weekend Travis had a large plate of grilled jumbo prawns at a restaurant. In the middle of the night his face was swollen and red. He had hives all over his body. He's had prawns before but not such a large quantity so we think he may have developed an allergy to them. Later that week I was listening to the book of Deuteronomy. I learned it was Moses' farewell speech. Again I heard that God said to only eat from the water creatures with fins and scales. Then, do not eat from the water creatures without fins or scales. I thought of Travis' allergy to prawns and mine to shark. I wondered why God said to only eat creatures with fins and scales. Then I remembered the article about the toxins. The other day I remembered in 1999 the whites of my eyes turned yellow. My liver function/enzymes were critically high and at first I tested positive for hepatitis then negative. I had just started taking a supplement made of sea products. My doctor said to be careful of sea products not processed properly because I could get hepatitis. I'd never heard that before and was skeptical. Since God created the creatures, did He know what was harmful for humans to eat, and therefore told us not to eat it? I take liquid canned nutrient (my manna) through a feeding tube now, but if I could eat food I would think twice about the seafood and meat I ate. And I love most shellfish, especially prawns.

The pruning process also reminded me of peeling off layers of an onion. But, as I thought more about it, an artichoke popped into my mind. I liked the idea of it being boiled or steamed and each thorny leaf representing those same old problems like unforgiveness, pride, self-will, etc. Then God pulls each leaf off till He reaches all those undeveloped leaves and the heart. But what if children were taught about all this? Perhaps they could skip this pruning and peeling off process or have an easier time compared to someone as old as me. They could bear fruit on the vine sooner or blossom into a beautiful artichoke flower. I feel that I've been pruned back to a point where I'm a lot like I was as a child. Of course, I'm wiser, more knowledgeable, more experienced, less energetic, grayer, etc. now. I sure wish my pruning started decades ago.

I often see myself opening the door to God or Satan. Trash bags full of garbage are blocking the door so God can't come in. The biggest one is labeled "unforgiveness". Then there's pride, self-will, vanity, greed, addictions, etc. Slowly the bags get smaller as the

door opens wider and I let more of God in. Cleaning out the junk in the bags gets easier with His help. But some bags don't seem to get smaller or they get small then fill up again. I keep trying to close the door on Satan but his foot is in the way and he refuses to leave quietly. It's my own fault...I let him make himself at home so now I can't get rid of him. But I know God will eventually win.

Comparing trials in our lives to storms is common, but a few months ago when Oklahoma was bombarded with tornadoes, I thought that analogy more applicable to me. We can find God in the eye of the tornado and can choose to stay there in the calm and peace until we are called Home. But God wants us to move back into the turbulence again. It's not fun and it's not easy. There He will prune us and bless us. And He will lead us completely out in victory. I was in the eye when I was at peace at having ALS. I could have remained there by not changing or giving into God's pruning. I believe I'm back in the turbulence now. I am at peace about having ALS but now God wants me to follow His will, not mine. The pruning has been intense. I still need to let go of Paul and the pruning now is focused on expectations. I still have expectations of Paul as a father, my replacement, husband, caregiver, and Christian. I need to get out of God's way. My expectations should be of God not people. When I have expectations of people I usually get disappointed and peace disappears. Since I am dependent on others for almost everything this is really a tough one for me. Joyce Meyer always says only God can change a person. But, I still keep trying. Letting go is so hard.

God and Satan are in or create the turbulence. I've come to see almost everything as a battlefield for them. Within me alone there's my body, mind, emotions, will, and spirit. Then there are places, events, organizations, etc. I heard that Satan once woke Martin Luther up in the middle of the night. When he saw it was Satan he said, "Oh, it's only you", and went back to sleep. At that time I wished I could react that way. Well, I think I'm really close now. I know God is in control and I thank him for taking care of the situation before I am even aware of it. The battle is His. And, some of Satan's schemes are almost funny to me now. But he keeps trying.

I've discovered that Satan seems to reveal himself to me at the same level God does. The week after my Walk to Emmaus in March 2000 was my first spiritual/mountain-top experience. God revealed Himself to me in the most amazing ways. On Friday, as I came back down, I realized that God was real. In an instant I knew Satan was real, too. The phone rang and a woman told me I had won a free trip to Las Vegas. I knew Satan was saying "Hi". What Satan does in my life seems to grow in direct proportion to what God does in my life.

It's now September 23, 2003 and I haven't written since August 30. I lost my momentum and spiritual empowerment. But Sunday's sermon about sharing our experiences and talking to a friend tonight who said I needed to finish this and share it with others nudged me to write again.

I know this will sound strange but God also makes the phone ring. At first it was to remind me to go to the bathroom since I stayed on the PC too long and couldn't rush. It took me longer with the walker and I had problems with my pants due to weak arms, hands, and fingers. I don't need the reminder now...like Pavlov's dog, I'm trainable. He still uses the

phone to get me out of bed when I want to sleep in though. It began when the phone rang and I asked if it was God. I said if He wanted me to get up, make it ring again...it did and I got up. Remember I'm an analytic, so I've tested it. Last year my alarm went off at 6:30 but I decided to sleep in and take a shower after I drove the kids to school. The phone rang so I got up and showered. When I got home from taking the kids to school, I got a call from the man who checks my breathing machine. He was finishing up with a client in Lincoln and wanted to swing by my place, which was about 20 minutes away. I thanked God for making me get up.

God also makes my bathroom light go out as a warning that something unpleasant is going to happen. I know it sounds unbelievable but my caregiver, Linda, can verify this because it usually occurs in the morning when she's with me. I first noticed it when we were having problems with our well. Then I remembered Linda got a flat tire another time. She remembered our dog got cut from barbed wire and needed stitches. It happened several times and I began to thank God that He was in control and had approved of whatever was going to happen. I knew it would turn out okay. Then I noticed something would happen and the light went off afterwards. The weekend Travis got hives, Linda got sick also and lost something important. The light went out on Monday. I figured we had come through it all right. I knew God was in control and I thanked Him for taking care of it before I even knew about it.

Then I noticed the light didn't go out. It's as if God didn't think I needed the warning anymore. On August 14, I asked Linda to pray for me because I felt unsettled. I thought it would be a day the light would have gone out. Later that day New York and neighboring states had a power outage. The next day I found out Linda's husband had gone to ER and was still in the hospital. Two weeks ago when Linda and I were in the bathroom, we heard a sound and our dog ran behind Linda and was shaking. We figured the dog and cat knocked something over. When we got to the dining room we saw that "something" had pushed the grate over the floor vent up and it landed about a foot from the opening. The cat was trying to go down the vent. When Linda put the grate back on she heard "something". The grate fits snug so I knew a mouse couldn't push it up. I talked a lot to God because we have a lot of vents and I didn't want "something" in the house. I told Him I preferred the "warning" from the light. Later that day I noticed Paul going outside with his voltage meter. After several questions I finally found out the bathroom light was out and it had tripped the circuit breaker. Paul doesn't believe in my God-incidents and he knows what I think about the bathroom light. I thanked God for the unusual evening warning and for being in control. But it seems the warnings are for Linda now. A week ago the light went out and that day her cat was scared and bit her and wouldn't let go. Her arm swelled and she couldn't use it for a week due to the pain. The light has gone out 3 times since...minor problems. But Linda's friend, my housekeeper, had a bad day so she now wants to know when the light goes out.

On August 13, I read a book that troubled me and it reminded me of some things about Satan that God told me about in January 2002. The next day the power outage in New York was like a big warning and message to me. When I went to the ALS meeting on Saturday I gave a woman a copy of my essay after she cried. She hadn't wanted it earlier but I thought it might help her to know how God helped me. Later she gave me a tract. When I read the Watch Tower tract "Who Really Rules the World?" it referenced scripture

I was familiar with. Since I had participated in a bible study of John recently I knew Satan is the ruler of the world. I felt God was confirming what I was thinking about. God prunes us to be more Christ like and Satan doesn't like it. It's not easy being a Christian in this world. It seems much easier to not be a Christian.

As I read the books after Isaiah, I began to feel unsettled and the thunderstorms seemed to be God's answers to my questions about the current condition of our world and His disciplining us. I began to lose the desire to finish this and e-mail it. The following devotional reading seemed appropriate. "When you are on the mountaintop, it's easy to say 'Oh yes, I believe God can do it' but you have to come down from the mountain to the demon-possessed valley and face the realities that scoff at your Mount-of-Transfiguration beliefs." (August 29, My Utmost for His Highest)

During my January 2002 experience I knew God wanted me to only take liquid food through my feeding tube and not eat food, and I obeyed. Also, not wear contacts (I stepped on them so I wouldn't be tempted to wear them) or glasses (I grabbed them to wear when I was taken to ER, but an ear piece fell off in ER). I believed that He would heal me of ALS. I knew the only medicine I needed was God's Word. I knew He wanted me to write about my experiences and I did.

I'm not sure which spirit prompted me to e-mail a badly written letter though. I rushed to send it before I corrected and tweaked it so someone wouldn't find it on the PC. I typed as God "dictated" to me and didn't put in proper punctuation to differentiate what He said from what I said. I received a few responses, all referencing scripture. One said I was not God and that He is sovereign and could have stopped the 9/11 terrorists. Others said I was a baby Christian unfamiliar with the Bible and needed to learn more. But one person found it interesting and wanted to hear more of my thoughts. Another wanted to read the attachment I forgot to send. As I felt less spiritual, I was so embarrassed by my e-mail that I sent everyone a follow-up e-mail saying doctors thought I had experienced a chemical imbalance. I knew doctors were wrong and it was a supernatural spiritual experience but I was worried about what people thought. I was angry at God for having me send that first e-mail. Now I can relate to Peter denying knowing Jesus. But because of my e-mail, 2 people replied that they understood what I had experienced, invited me to their spiritual church or prayer meeting, told me about spiritual warfare, the armor of God, and told me some people would not believe me. God showed me who could advice me about the supernatural. What was amazing though was my distribution list. I was told to send it to everyone so I was going to do a "select all" but was told to select each name so I just started clicking down the list. There were some names I could not select no matter how many times I clicked on them. Then I noticed they were mostly companies or people I didn't know. After awhile I just clicked once and moved to the next name. I discovered someone could control my PC supernaturally. I learned to be sure to edit what I write before I send it. I also learned that being a mature Christian and knowing the Bible are not prerequisites to having a supernatural spiritual experience.

It's hard to believe what I believed back then and to obey now. I finally gave up eating real food last month. I know God can heal me of ALS but I'm not really sure He will. I read the Bible but I still need Advil. I'm still wearing glasses. I still find it difficult to write about my experiences. But I think a lot about what God showed me in January. Self will

sure gets in the way of doing God's will. I pray my will becomes His will and that He will not lose His patience with me.

Well, it seems that when I quit writing a few weeks ago, everything I read and Joyce Meyer's daily TV program helped me understand what God is doing in my life and what He expects of me.

I'm a perfectionist so I'd like to keep tweaking this. I've read that being a perfectionist is merely a way to procrastinate. Today, September 25, My Utmost for His Highest said, "Our Lord's making of a disciple is supernatural. He does not build on any natural capacity of ours at all. God does not ask us to do the things that are naturally easy for us—He only asks us to do the things that we are perfectly fit to do through His grace, and that is where the cross we must bear will always come." Today Joyce said to "do it afraid" and that we need to move out of our comfort zone. I told Linda, God, and Satan I would e-mail this on Friday, tomorrow.

Linda has been devotedly watering some plants in front of the house since the drip system seems to be clogged. A very special plant my mom gave me years ago has beautiful small purple flowers that fade to lavender and then white after a few days. Mom says it's called Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow and has a large bush in front of Dad and her house. It's beautiful in the Spring when the bush is covered with flowers of those 3 colors but now the bush is covered with small round seeds. Today Linda noticed a solitary purple flower and I could see it because it faced the doorway. She felt the plant was thanking her. We both knew it was a God thing. Later as I thought of the name of the plant and a similar reference to Jesus, it was so symbolic. The single majestic purple flower will slowly transform to white, then die to become a seed.

It's Friday and I'm tweaking. Today's Streams in the Desert reading closed with "Jesus Christ...the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8) I've decided to call that bush my "Jesus bush" now.

As I'm typing this Joyce Meyer is preaching about stubbornly disobeying God and missing out on what He has for us. As I finished reading the Old Testament I thought about how much easier it should be for us to obey God. We have salvation from Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Old and New Testament, Saints, testimonies, spiritual leaders, books galore, mass media, etc. Why don't people have the power the Disciples and Apostles had to heal and perform miracles? I believe it's available to us but many of us just haven't realized it and haven't figured out how to receive it yet.

The last few days God has been diligently encouraging me. I even had a dream I was in a jungle and a huge python fell on me but someone pushed it off and it was no big deal. Later I was in 7th grade in a classroom making a glass terrarium and a baby snake kept trying to crawl out of the small opening. I finally covered the opening with tape but left air holes so it wouldn't die. I rushed outside to catch the bus but it had already left. It was dark now so I went to the office to use the phone. The women (friends from HP) said it was a new phone system and I couldn't use it yet. I explained I needed to call home for someone to come get me so they said I could use the phone if my father would take them home, too. Remember, I don't usually remember my dreams...and this seems rather

simple to interpret.

Well, the last few days Satan has also been discouraging and deterring me. I've woken up with sinus headaches. Yesterday morning Tara was in a hurry before her ride came so she dumped the crushed Advil directly into the syringe before dissolving it in water and it plugged up the syringe and detachable feeding tube. Not sure how much Advil I really got. Then I dropped a book and couldn't grasp it with my fingers and got frustrated. I used my feet to push it to the sofa then used my feet to lift it onto the sofa where I could pick it up with my hands. I was discouraged I had to adapt again. Then I had to go to the bathroom and was annoyed the entire process took so long. My feet began to slip but amazingly I was able to grab hold of the wheelchair although I would have just sat back down on the toilet. I thanked God and was glad I had turned the stereo on (tuned to the Fish). I really am rarely frustrated, discouraged, or annoyed by my limitations so I knew the headache was affecting my emotions.

Our dog ran away 3 times the last 2 days (she hasn't done that for months) and came back wet each time. Twice she was muddy from the neighbor's pond. He's putting in a new fence so he doesn't have cows right now so at least there aren't any fresh cow chips for her to roll in. I've also been hearing "something" in the vent. When I was praying yesterday the phone rang. I thought it might be the man who was coming to check my breathing machine so I went to the answering machine. It was a man reminding us we'd won a trip to Las Vegas or Orlando and he hadn't heard back from us. Satan and God use the phone.

I'm not sure I'll get to send this today since the PC is in the bedroom and Paul is sleeping in the bedroom. He came home from work at 11 AM with a horrible headache. In the 26 years we've been married he's only come home early due to illness a few times. It's 8 PM and he's still sleeping. He helped me in the bathroom and fed me dinner, though. But I know God is in control. Hey, it gives me more time to tweak. And, I'm not sure who's closing the door. I was happy to hear a pastor I know and Joyce Meyer both say there were times they were forcefully rebuking Satan and later realized it was God. That's why I prefer to praise and thank God for taking care of it already.

However, I know that if I wait too long again I'll lose the courage to send this. The following devotional reading really helps me understand why I need to share my experiences though: "If you are always keeping blessings to yourself and never learning to pour out anything 'to the Lord' other people will never have their vision of God expanded through you." (September 3, My Utmost for His Highest)

I hope that what I shared with you shows how God can reveal Himself to us. I also plan to write about my God-incidents and Satan-incidents, being touched by celestial angels who were earthly friends, Godly connections, my 2 mountain top experiences, and thoughts on healing.

God bless you,

Lois

EASTER MESSAGE

Easter Message 2020

-----Original Message-----

From: [mailto:]

Sent: 4/12/2020

Subject: Easter Message 2020

Happy Easter,

I wasn't going to send another Easter message but got the nudge this morning. Many of you have replied that you've enjoyed the emails with funny memes. Well, this is more serious. It is about me me :-)

Last month I was watching the 700 Club and saw a news report about swarms of locusts in East Africa. It's the worst infestation in 70 years. It sounded like something out of the Bible. The footage looked like a scene from the movie The 10 Commandments with Moses and the plagues on Egypt. East Africa is currently dealing with the locusts and the Coronavirus situation.

I also saw a story about European cathedrals being sold. There was footage of one cathedral now used as the Frankenstein Theatre. Another is used for aerial acrobatic shows because of the high ceilings. It also made me think about the Bible. Jesus got angry at the money changers and said, "It is written, my house will be a house of prayer...".

Like many people I am wondering about what's going on. I wonder about God's involvement. I think it's really interesting that this started happening before Passover and Easter.

The last couple of weeks the topic on the show Praise has been the Coronavirus. Different pastors, authors and even scientists have talked about it. The pastors emphasized that God is in control. He is bigger than the coronavirus. They said that "Do not fear" is in the Bible 365 times. They also said that "God causes all things to work together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His plan and purpose." Romans 8 : 28. Another said that the enemy responds to what God is doing. I think I see that in my own experiences. When I think I've had a breakthrough in my behavior, something happens and I go back to my old behavior. One pastor said that the Coronavirus is the enemy and we all need to work together to fight it. This is a time to pray, help others and be a light in a dark world.

Joseph Prince, the pastor of a mega church in Singapore said that God controls time and space. He said that it takes 3 years to turn grapes into wine. However, Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding which was his first miracle. He said that the 2nd miracle Jesus performed was healing a boy from a distance. He didn't have to be in the house with the boy. I thought the concept of God's ability to compress time and space was really interesting.

I rarely leave the house and seldom have visitors so shelter in place and social distancing is not new for me. I've been feeling like ALS prepared me for this already. This morning I

was thinking about the similarities between what I have gone through with ALS and what others are going through now. I don't believe God wanted me to have ALS. But, I see the silver lining. I turned to God. I prioritized what was important in my life. I was forced to slow down and eliminated the "busyness", the distractions I was wasting time on. I think my life is better now. I would rather have ALS and God than no ALS and no relationship with God. ALS certainly got me to turn to God and I wonder if COVID -19 will get people to turn to God. It seems like it has taken people back to a time when life was simpler. More time at home. Spending more time with family and doing what is important. People are enjoying homemade meals. We are worshipping at home, our own sanctuary. Technology is great. We can shop, worship and socialize in the safety of our house.

As I think about Moses telling the Hebrews to put the blood of a lamb over their doorways so death would pass over their house, I think about how the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God, does the same thing for us.

The other day I saw on the news that a man who had COVID -19 recovered. So researchers are using his blood to create a serum that can be used to help others with COVID -19 recover or create a vaccine to prevent anyone from getting it. It occurred to me that we all have a virus called SIN. The result is death. However, Jesus recovered from it. So His blood in us saves us.

If that's difficult to understand or you're just not interested, that's okay. Start with God. He knows you better than you know yourself. He knows when, where, what, and how to reach you.

I have included last year's Easter Message below. I hope your walk with God is as amazing and even better than mine has been. I was born again spiritually and want to know God better and better. I want to change and become a better person. One who loves God and pleases Him.

Happy Easter.

God bless you,

Lois

Easter Message 2019

-----Original Message-----

From: Lois (gmail)

Sent: 4/19/2019

Subject: Easter Message

Hello,

For several days I have been thinking about sending an Easter email. When I am feeling strong spiritually I want to share what I'm learning with everyone. And, I tend to be bolder. So be forewarned. I will do my best to keep this short and simple. I may decide to delete it before I actually send it. But, I really believe this is a good time to reflect on what Easter is about. My concept of reality has been turned upside down. And, I'm beginning to think that the upside-down concept is the real reality; the truth. Do I have your attention?

Around 2005 I saw the following quote in a daily devotional. "Our main mean in life is not to do, but to become." F. B. Meyer. It was in a nutshell what God had been teaching me since my diagnosis of ALS in January 1999. He was showing me that becoming was more important than doing. I was growing weaker physically so there was less that I could do. But, He was helping me change so I would become stronger spiritually, emotionally and mentally.

In March 2000 I had what I consider my 1st spiritual experience. I attended the Walk to Emmaus and I think it catapulted me into the spiritual realm. I was already noticing coincidences around the time I was diagnosed but the week after the Walk was different. Everything started to seem like a message from God. I felt like I was in the Twilight Zone as I grew closer and closer to God. I attended the 1st Granite Bay High School Benefit Concert for ALS with a friend from college. We had actually taken a Music Appreciation class together. Everything about the concert was like God was telling me He had orchestrated my life; being Japanese and having a Christian foundation. (I was editing this and just realized that God was also telling me that my Japanese upbringing and Christian faith would help me cope with ALS. Something I realized years later.)

Later in the week God told me that those of us with ALS were "chosen". I was so excited. I know it sounds crazy but It made sense to me. Because of the progressive nature of the disease, we have the opportunity to focus on God and rely on God in a way few people can. We don't have the distractions of life that most people have. He can help us if we ask. But, we have to humble ourselves.

I knew I was supposed to write about my walk with God so I was on my computer writing instead of sleeping. The funny thing is that I really didn't have much to write about at that time. On Friday I was in need of an intervention and thankfully some people at church convinced me that I needed to go home and get some sleep. After my nap I received an email from someone that made me realize how God had orchestrated everything. There was a moment when I knew with every fiber of my being that God was real. In an instant I knew that the devil was real, too. The phone rang and a telemarketer told me that I had won a trip to Las Vegas or Disneyland. My choice. I knew the devil was letting me know that he

knew that I now knew he was real. Before that moment I didn't believe he was real. But, when I realized he was real, I didn't handle it well at all. I got scared and panicked. I wanted to throw out anything that opened the door to evil. But, God knew who I needed to talk to and what I needed to be at peace again. The spiritual experience ended and I was okay.

I had my 2nd spiritual experience in January 2002. I think it started with me thinking about my grandmother, Ba-chan. I shared a bedroom with her until I went to college. She had a stroke in 1966 and became bedridden so sharing a bedroom with her when I was a teenager resulted in some unresolved issues that I wasn't aware of. Yeah, I believe God works on issues of the heart first. Love and forgiveness are important for healing. I think it opens the door more to God. After that I began to feel nudges to write about my walk with God again. This time I stubbornly and defiantly refused for several days. But, I learned that when God wants me to do something, He doesn't give up. Two episodes of chest pains finally got me writing what eventually became the essay "God, ALS, and Prayer". As I worked on the essay I grew closer and closer to God.

I had a surreal experience that I wrote about in my essay "Sharing Experiences". God led me through the process of letting go of everything I loved. I had to love God more than Paul, Travis, Tara and everything else. I had to surrender everyone and everything I valued including my own life. It was like a surreal simulation. That night I believe I experienced the peace of God that surpasses all understanding. I was filled with peace, understanding and compassion. It was awesome!! I realized it was how Jesus felt until He took our sins and was separated from His Father. The last 3 days of my spiritual experience were about the devil. At first I was so full of the Spirit and focused on God that I was fine. However, God wanted me to experience it without Him, too. Yeah, I didn't handle it well and I got scared and panicked again. God sent some people to help. The experience ended and I was fine. It was beyond my understanding. But, over the years God continued to help me change and grow spiritually. I began to understand the experience better and things I learned seemed to come true.

I had my 3rd spiritual experience in May 2018. It began with Tara's graduation from UC Berkeley on Mother's day. It was a wonderful day and I thanked God that I was able to see her receive her Master's degree. The more I thought about God's hands on her graduation day, the closer and closer I got to God. I began to have insights and I had a better understanding of what God was doing in my life. I began writing a new essay. But, then my connection with God kept getting stronger and I had more and more insights. I stopped working on the essay.

I realized that each spiritual experience taught me something about the spiritual realm. When I applied what I learned during the spiritual experience to my life, I had another spiritual experience. It was like moving up to a higher level of spirituality. I realized that I was supposed to surrender everyone and everything to God and love Him more than anyone or anything else. (Abraham putting Issac on the altar.) Sadly, it took me 16 years to actually do that in my life. I didn't get an "A" on my homework or the test but apparently I did enough to pass. I was ready to move up a level and have another spiritual experience. I learned that when God is not the most important thing in our life, we put whatever we value more than Him above Him. He will protect what we surrender to Him. I was having

problems because I had not fully surrendered all to God. I thought I had but I was still relying on others instead of God. Being physically disabled I was relying on people to help me, not God. I hope you learn from me so it doesn't take you 16 years to surrender everyone and everything to God.

I was also led to think of the book "The Art of War" from a spiritual perspective. I had been led to the book a couple of years earlier in terms of human behavior but this time I was led to think about the devil and his tactics and strategies. I found a website with 500 quotes from the book. It said that all war is based on deception. I think most people don't realize the devil is real. That is his greatest deception. People don't know they have an enemy and are in a war. Some of you are probably going to stop reading if you've made it to this point. I understand. But, please take a minute to think about the state of the world. Doesn't it seem like evil is taking over? Remember, I didn't know about the spiritual realm and about spiritual warfare until after my diagnosis of ALS. I believe that adversity can help us turn to God for strength and hope. I believed that God was the only one who could help me. Many of us don't think we need God when things are going well. Also, a deception. I realize it's hard to understand if you haven't been "awakened" spiritually. Ask God to help you with that.

I learned a lot more about God and the devil last year. We don't have to be afraid of him. Some of you might not know that he was a high ranking Angel in Heaven and was planning a revolt against God. So he and his band of angels were kicked out of Heaven. I was told that he doesn't like to be called Fallen Angel. He likes "Satan" and the other names because they make him sound powerful. And, it scares people. The Art of War says to irritate the enemy. I am no match against Fallen Angel so if I can irritate him I'll take it. Last year I also learned that God and Fallen Angel can do a lot more in my life than I realized. However, I learned to ask God what to do, relied on Him, trusted Him and listened to Him. But in the end I didn't handle it well, again. I got scared and panicked again. But, I did better this time. I had so many insights last year. They were about other people and the future. I am not quite sure how I am supposed to apply them to my life. But, "sow the seed" keeps popping into my head. I am a farmer's daughter so I understand planting, watering and harvesting. I guess I'm supposed to plant and wait. God is in control. If what I've shared helps one person, I've done well. Feel free to share this email with others.

When I put on my spiritual glasses I can see that God and Fallen Angel are behind everything. We are in a spiritual war and we have an enemy that wants to separate us from God, the Father. But I believe Fallen Angel doesn't want us to know that Jesus defeated him 2000 years ago. Jesus died and rose again. Yes, we have salvation through Him. But, I think we also have His resurrection power within us. We just don't know it. The more Christ-like we become, the stronger we grow spiritually. And, His power grows stronger. Imagine having the kind of relationship Jesus had with God. I think God is teaching me that it's possible. Am I crazy? Maybe. There are certainly times when I think I am. But, then I think about my life. It sure seems like God has been orchestrating everything. Some people have told me that my faith is strong. I have replied that if they had the God-incidences and 3 spiritual experiences I've had, they'd probably be walking on water by now. I'm still in a wheelchair. However, I'm still alive which is a miracle. Maybe you'll be the first person to walk on water. Wouldn't that be awesome?!!

I hope you will think about what I've shared with you this Easter. I don't think I am special. I believe God wants all of us to have a strong and intimate relationship with Him. He's just using me to share what He's teaching me. I believe it's why I'm still alive. He is showing me the healing process. Become more Christ-like.

We are in a spiritual war and we should be working together to fight our common enemy. But, he has divided us in so many different ways that we are fighting each other. Isn't the resurrection about Jesus defeating the devil? It's done. Why are we still having problems? Here are a few scriptures to think about.

Jeremiah 29 : 11.

Isaiah 53 : 5 and 1 Peter 2 : 24.

Romans 8 : 28.

James 4 : 7.

Ephesians 6 : 10-20.

I really believe children and Christians are under attack. Surrender all to God. And, pray for everyone and everything.

Happy Easter and Resurrection Day!

Love, joy and peace,

Lois