

Mark's Blog: www.mkknight.com

Bread Crumbs In the Storm



Written By: Kathy Knight

Dedicated to

our two beautifully captivating daughters, so that through this collection of stories,
you will know God's Hand in the passing of your beloved brother.
May the telling of the Grace of God be handed down to the generations.

"Do not hide them from your children. Tell the next generation about God's
praiseworthy deeds, His power, and His wonders performed."

[Psalms 78:4]

Bread Crumbs in the Storm

Psalm 34

¹ “This is my chance to bless GOD; my lungs expand with praise.

² ...if things aren't going well, hear this story and be happy:

³ Join me in spreading the news;
together let's get the word out.

⁴ GOD met me more than halfway,
He freed me from my anxious fears....

⁶ When I was desperate, I called out...

⁷ GOD's angel sets up a circle
of protection around us while we prayed...

¹⁵ GOD kept an eye on us,
His ears pick up every moan and groan...

¹⁷ Is anyone of you crying for help? GOD is listening,
ready to rescue you.

¹⁸ If your heart is broken, you'll find GOD right there...

²⁰ He's your bodyguard, shielding every bone...

²² ...no one who runs to Him, loses out.”

(Paraphrased from 'The Message')

AUTHOR'S NOTES

I smiled politely as I gazed into her sincere face. She wasn't the only one who had suggested I write a book after reading my original *'Bread Crumbs'*. She was very sweet and for that I thanked her. But I also said that I'd written down the original collection of short stories, firstly to capture what God had so amazingly done for us during the month of August 2009. This being especially important, knowing that in time, details become blurred and facts forgotten. I also wrote the original *'Bread Crumbs'* for our two lovely daughters. They had lost their beloved brother, their only brother. Their eyes were now fixed on us, desperately looking for faith, hope and peace as we searched for a reason why.

With yet another person suggesting I write, I found myself wondering if this was something God would endorse. No sooner had I 'opened that door', I started to feel sick. Can the world cope with one more book?!

When the pessimism hit its lowest point, I was tidying my room and moaning, *"What on earth could I say that is of any use to anyone? We are flooded with every kind of book filled with every kind of advice. If we lived in the days of Noah¹, we'd be building an Ark just to survive the 'knowledge flood'! Is there really any room left in the world for even one more book?!"*

Then, in the manifold wisdom of God and His rich logic, I heard His 'still small voice'² saying, *"Yes, but the world can never have too much personal testimony about ME."* I smiled as I thought of John's closing remarks in his own book so many centuries before: *"Jesus did many other things not recorded here, and if every one of them were written down, I imagine that even the whole world would not have room for the books that could be written."*³

This isn't another 'how-to' book whose advice and philosophy competes with a myriad of books by clever authors. This is **a personal testimony** where, like King David of old, I will 'sing His praises'⁴. I don't want to come to you with *wise and persuasive words* but instead, I want to *demonstrate* to you *God's power*⁵, that is: His unfailing love and abundant compassion; His intimate involvement in every day human affairs; His understanding of pain in this life; and the consistent, dependable Light He shines on our paths to 'see us through' whatever it is that Life on Planet Earth throws at us. All this is freely available to those who seek His face. *"If you seek me,"* God said through the ancient prophet Jeremiah, *"**you will find me**, if only you would seek me with all your heart."*⁶

With that in mind, this book is most especially for those who have little experience with the Maker of Heaven and Earth. They want to set their heart on seeking the Creator God, and finding Him, in perhaps the worst storms of their lives. For those who are new to the possibility of the existence of a Creator God, I greatly encourage you to look up the people and stories I refer to in the footnotes, as you walk this journey of personal faith with me. If you look them up and read those stories too, I am confident that the basis of my testimony here will be made clear to you.

May God's Word speak louder to you than my own words, though I pray that the 'word of my testimony' becomes for you a seed of hope springing up to Eternal Life.

¹ Genesis 5:28-9:17

² 1 Kings 19:11&12

³ John 21:25

⁴ Psalms 18:49

⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:4

⁶ Jeremiah 29:13

PROLOGUE

The state of emergency out on the street was intensifying. Our neighbours were running for their cars clinging to basic belongings they'd shovelled into their arms before locking their doors. Already a traffic jam had formed on the only exit route from this neighbourhood. My husband was away and I was home alone with our kids. But I had no time to think about that now. The minutes I had left were to be used for saving our children.

The house shuddered one more time as I raced to the kitchen where our eldest daughter had been sitting at the kitchen table doing her University coursework. I reached the kitchen door in time to see the slab of concrete, that formed its foundation, break into several large pieces to reveal the lava that had come up the drains from under our street. She was on her feet now. Standing on an 'island' of molten lava and protected only by the foot-thick cement block. As I grabbed for her with my left hand to drag her out, I reached for the door of the closest food cupboard on my right. But as I opened the cupboard door, lava poured out onto the disintegrating floor. It had only been minutes but already it was too late to think about any more supplies.

"Get out! Quickly get out!!" I screamed to the kids who were by now standing in the back room off the lounge in a state of absolute shock.

Making our retreat, the kids were 'glued' to their car windows, pointing in every direction to the rising smoke. It was exactly like the time of our 2001 'Foot and Mouth' outbreak, when smoke from the pyres of incinerating livestock could be seen in distant fields. My head was spinning as we joined the exodus on the road heading east. None of us could have believed that our beautiful valley on the border of Scotland would erupt in every direction with volcanic activity! At that moment, I remembered the volcano that Mike had learnt about in primary school. It was a book that he and I worked on together, and the subject fascinated me.

It was 1943 in Mexico when a farmer preparing his fields saw the ground nearby open in a crevice about 150ft long. Smoke and fine dust filled the air. Then the ground seemed to swell and rise 8ft higher. A modern day volcano was born right under their feet! By the next morning, it was 30ft high and by the end of the day, 120 feet. They named it Paricutin (or Paricut  n) after the village it destroyed. It's now an incredible 2800m high⁷.

We jabbered wildly, remembering all this from Mike's school work. We couldn't believe it was now happening to us! From the review mirror, I could see Mike staring wide-eyed and open-mouthed as we were all hit with the shocking fact that this was actually happening all around us. I couldn't believe Mark wasn't with us! I was screaming inside, "I can't do this alone! How on earth are we going to find each other in all this chaos?"

But the trauma was only just beginning. The road we were on meets a main 'A' road to the east coast. It was our only hope of escape. As we rounded the corner and entered a level stretch, the landscape opened out to reveal smoke rising from a smouldering river of lava right across our path where the main road junction used to be.

By now, our house was sure to have been destroyed. There would be no chance of retreat returning by that route. Now the road ahead was completely cut off!! The kids were whimpering and my blood ran cold.

...

I opened my eyes and looked out our bedroom window. The pale streak of winter sunlight gathering on the south-eastern horizon could be seen through the condensation that had formed behind the curtains during the night. I snuggled deep into the blankets, tucking them firmly round my back and cold neck, before pushing back the vivid imagery of the dream.

It was New Years 2009.

⁷ <http://www.news.com.au/travel/galleries/gallery-e6frflw0-1226166911041?page=7>

PART ONE:

FOLLOWING
THE
BREAD CRUMBS

It was after yet another amazing so-called ‘coincidence’ that my brother said,
“This is like following the bread crumbs.”
My mind immediately pictured Hansel and Gretel from the Brothers Grimm fairy tale,
making their way back home through a dark and unfamiliar forest by following bread
crumbs that Hansel had left behind.
Jesus taught us to pray, “...*Give us this day our daily bread...*”⁸
Now, like ‘manna’ from heaven⁹,
we found ourselves following a path of clues leading back ‘home’
to faith and trust in God as He sent us...
...*bread crumbs in the storm.*

⁸ Matthew 6:9-13 (referencing v11)

⁹ Exodus 16:31

INTRODUCTION: THE MOMENT THAT CHANGED IT ALL

It seemed to be an ordinary mid-summer Saturday morning. The sun was shining through our large bedroom windows that overlooked our south facing back garden (an important house feature in the north of England where sunshine is a rarity). Unbeknown to us as we made our lazy exit from our bed, we'd just woken to a morning that would soon change our lives, and the history of our little family, forever.

Mark had woken around 7am, made his cup of tea and returned to bed where he fired up his laptop. Our oldest daughter was at sea at the time. She was a staff member aboard our charity's ship visiting several ports in the Caribbean. Our youngest had made her bed on the floor of her room that night, and slept soundly behind her closed door. By 8:05, Mark got concerned that Michael, our middle child and only son, had not risen for work.

For close on a year, Mike had been working as a 'hamburger chef'¹⁰ at McDonalds and was often called upon to work the breakfast shift. He had finished a 6-month stint as a deck hand aboard our smaller ship, also in the Caribbean and had come home firmly set on a future in Worship through Christian music. The idea was to raise as much money from his wages at McDonalds (and through sponsorship from kind friends and family) to put himself through a college course at Nexus Christian Music School in Coventry¹¹. He was to learn how to lead worship music in churches.

Knowing that Mike was self-sufficient in getting up and out for work on time (often leaving the house at 6:30am before the rest of us had risen), and having not heard Mike stir yet at all, Mark decided to go in and wake him.

There was no response from the first call as Mark stood in the darkened doorway, so he turned on the light and called to Mike again. There was something clearly wrong. Going over to him, and this time reaching out to give him a kind of 'arms-length' gentle shake, Mark knew without doubt that his son, his only son, the son that he loved, in whom he was well pleased¹², was dead.

I had got up and met Mark in the doorway of our bedroom. Gasping for breath he said, "I'm not joking, call 999. Mike's dead." It seemed at that point, I stepped out of my body. In a bizarre out-of-body, fragmented state of suspended animation I lived, and moved, and existed, either one inch ahead of my body or one inch behind my soul for close on three months following that one life-changing moment.

I pushed passed Mark on the landing and headed straight for Mike's room. Standing over him, clutching my hands and taking in his fractionally opened eyes, and lips that had already begun to turn white, I simply said, "Yes, he's gone, he's definitely gone." I was completely calm. Abnormally calm. It was as if I'd been hit by a car; thrown into a hedge; picked myself up, and stood on the sidewalk staring into space and saying I was fine.

This was clearly not a rescue situation. You don't get white lips, even partially white lips, in 3 minutes. In 4 minutes, you have irreversible brain damage. Mike had been gone longer than a rescue could reverse. I *walked* down the steps. Went to the phone and dialled 999 as I whispered fervently, "God what are you doing? You're up to something. I know you're up to something. What are you doing? You have to tell us what you're doing!" They had answered by the time I reached Mark (who was by now holding himself up on the banister rail) and with surreal composure I said, "I'll pass you over to my husband," then I returned to Mike.

Less than 2 minutes had passed from the time I got out of bed that sunny Saturday morning. Two short minutes, in which a Tsunami engulfed our home, leaving one of us dead. Two minutes for a volcano to erupt in unthinkable power right under our feet: a volcano that would rock our home to its very foundations; lava, pushing up through the floor boards and flowing out from every cupboard. No warning. No time to gather supplies for the long journey ahead. Utter devastation encamped in every direction around us while we made our escape, and no chance of retreat down yesterday's road.

The following is an account of God's Amazing Grace in the remaining days of August 2009 – the days that followed those two infamous minutes. It is a personal testimony that bears witness to the fact that the Most High God¹³, who created and sustains all things¹⁴, is not just alive, but is also at work in minute detail, showing great compassion and unending love to ordinary people in extraordinary ways.

¹⁰ At the Inquest into Mike's death, the Coroner wanted to put Mike's occupation into his official report. We were all at a loss as to what the title would be for someone who cooks meals at McDonalds. He filed his report having called Mike a "hamburger chef". We thought Mike would have smiled at that, as we did.

¹¹ <http://www.nexustrust.co.uk/>

¹² Matthew 3:17

¹³ Genesis 14:18-20

¹⁴ Colossians 1:16-17

1. THE COUNT DOWN

The count down for Mike's departure could be dated back to January 2009 when my brother stepped through the doors of a travel agent in Australia and asked for a flight to the UK set for August 2nd. He and his wife have never taken holidays in August, and why August 2nd? Right up to Saturday August 1st he had no idea why he and his wife were going to England apart from having a desire to 'follow God's lead' and 'be available' for what God had for them.

Theologically, one could say that the days ordained for Mike were written in God's book, when He knitted Mike together in my womb¹⁵. It would have been implanted into Mike's DNA code, in the original 'blueprint'. God would have known if there was any kind of genetic defect that may one day result in sudden death early in life. He would have watched Mike enjoying each birthday, knowing it was one year closer to the finish line. God knew on his 18th birthday that he wouldn't see his 19th birthday. And God knew when I said goodnight (and managed to sneak a kiss in behind Mike's neck as he sat watching TV at 10pm on the night of July 31st 2009) that I wouldn't again get that privilege, nor to feel Mike's warm skin against my face and to smile as he wriggled from my embrace.

Writing in our summer newsletter, concerning the recent death of a close friend in Australia, and sent out just days before Mike left us, I wrote: *"The deepest questions in life are often answered not through searching what we **don't** know, but embedded in what we **do** know. We know that God knows our days from our birth. A time frame is given to all of us. What we do in that time frame doesn't give us a right to an extension in the 'eleventh hour'. Instead, it serves to make us proud of how we lived for Him, while we had the time."*

Since God is Omniscient (all-knowing), we can be sure that God knew the day and the hour Mike was to leave this earth. The days ordained for Mike were 18 years, 6 months and 13 days. That's 222½ months; 967 weeks or 6,769 days. He was born on a Saturday morning and died on a Saturday morning. God knew - but He didn't warn us. Even having had Mike's heart tested when he was younger at a specialized heart unit on the east coast as a result of suspected epilepsy, we still were not alerted by the doctors to any problems that may end his life here. Some kind people have told us about a genetic disorder that kills even the most athletic of young men¹⁶, but that still doesn't explain why God kept quiet. Even when Mike stopped breathing in the early hours of Saturday August 1st, we slept soundly, without one prompting from God that would bring us to his room in time to save him.

With tears that blurred my vision and made my heart ache, I sat in bed late one night stroking the picture of Mike's smiling face looking up at me from his funeral sheet. I was struck by the fact that God knew when the picture was taken a year earlier, that I would one day weep for that lost smile - a smile now that will only ever be enjoyed from a computer screen or a cold paper printout. The paper, like thick glass, separates me from Mike now. Like a scene from the pilot episode of the *"Anne of Green Gables"*¹⁷ TV series, how I wished in that darkened room *'to find the spell that would help me step through that paper into Mike's world'*. If not for only a short time, to hug him once more; to tell him how proud I was of him, and to say 'goodbye'.

My finite mind swims with speculation. I rush headlong toward pure physical answers that topple my frail theological 'stack of cards' that I have piled around my confused heart. Pure logic tells me Mike's dead, plain and simple. The machine stopped, that's it and that's all. Death happens all the time and 100% of all humans experience it at some point.

Then I swing toward theological precepts that dream of Mike in worship before the throne of God¹⁸. He left for a higher calling and greater purpose. As the sun rose on August 1st 2009, Mike was visited by The Bridegroom Himself¹⁹. Or sent for by Royal messengers just before dawn - in the same way the Angels took Lot's hand as dawn approached, and resolutely led him out of the city of Sodom²⁰. Like Enoch, Michael walked with God. Then he was no more, because God took him away²¹.

¹⁵ Psalm 139:13 & 16

¹⁶ <http://www.c-r-y.org.uk/>

¹⁷ <http://www.anneofgreengables.com/>

¹⁸ Daniel 7:10

¹⁹ Matthew 25:6

²⁰ Genesis 19:16

²¹ Genesis 5:24 - The words inscribed on Mike's Tombstone

In the days following August 1st my mind traveled far and wide over what happened to Mike and why we weren't warned. Then, as I mopped the kitchen floor, my imagination settled on an age old topic I'd day-dreamed over in the past...

God gave a promise to Abraham that "...all nations on earth will be blessed through him."²² The blessing planned for us all (all nations, all peoples) will come through Abraham and his offspring or his 'seed'.

I've always wondered what happened to the 'seed of Abraham' after the children of Israel were dispersed in Babylon and beyond²³. We know that only some returned to Israel towards the end of Old Testament and by WWII we heard of communities in Russia, Germany, Holland and Poland to name just a few places. I remembered reading an article a while back on human history and genetics. DNA studies had begun to show signs that modern day humanity descended from a group of African ancestors, and therefore possibly from one family. At the time of reading I wanted to shout at the printed page, "*Hello! Has anyone heard of Noah!!*"²⁴

The concept of belonging genetically to the Jews (even after centuries of inter-marriage) had made me wonder why some people seem to believe with little difficulty, and why others can't get their head around faith in God at all. Psychologists say that children receive fragmented memory implants from their parents in their DNA. If that's true, how far down the line does that go? Could it be that the Covenant Blessing of Abraham (and Noah's Blessing on Shem & Japheth before him)²⁵, is more than a promise but somehow part of our DNA. Not only has the blessing gone out to the nations through Abraham and his seed, but the genetics within the 'seed' has infused into the nations as well.

Let me clarify that this does not give way to theories of predestination that border on a form of karma. We all have equal ability to believe simply by looking at the created world around us. "*For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.*"²⁶

But in my daydreams, I have wondered in the past if I'm related to the Jews from the days they were dispersed. Perhaps it's possible now that when I get to heaven, I'll be told that my family tree dates back to the family of the Priest Eli²⁷. I may even be told that my Michael was from that priestly line. It may explain why he was predisposed to stay away from anything 'not good' and set apart²⁸ to live in this 'bubble' he so obviously floated around in, with his sights set firmly on worship. He would walk around smiling and talking to himself so that we thought he had something wrong with him. Was he talking to God? He was 18 but no ordinary 18 year old boy. His mindset was that of a 14 year old in his simplicity/naivety/purity. Could it be that the explanation for his short life is dated back to God's edict on the house of Eli in the book of Samuel: that the lives of his descendants would be cut short in their prime? A system virus released into the ecosystem of that family and handed down through DNA.

The voice of King Solomon's Wisdom saying: "*Speculation, speculation! All this is speculation*"²⁹ snaps me back to the reality of my kitchen chores. It's meaningless to speculate over things we don't know, things that don't help.

The fact is: God is above being answerable to us, just as He was in the days of Job³⁰.

The fact is: God will be God in heaven as He has always been on earth. Though we will come into His presence changed, purified and even 'holy'³¹, God will still be God. As such, He remains above being answerable to us.

The fact is: Even in heaven (and contrary to the kind words of our friends over this time) we *may never know why* this has happened, because God is God and His sovereign authority rules. He owes us no explanations. There has never been a day, nor will there be (even until the end of eternity) where it will become necessary for God to explain His actions to a created being (transformed and holy though we may be when we see Him face to face) because, quite simply and yet quite completely ...He ...is ... God.

²² Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 28:14 & Acts 3:25

²³ 2 Kings 25

²⁴ Genesis 7:1&7

²⁵ Genesis 9:26 & 27

²⁶ Romans 1:20

²⁷ 1 Samuel 2:30-33

²⁸ Leviticus 20:26 and 1Peter 2:9

²⁹ Ecclesiastes 1:2

³⁰ Job 38:1 to Job 40:2

³¹ 1 Corinthians 15:51 & 52

Having said that, while He didn't warn us (though He knew the day Mike would die from the day Mike was born yet didn't help us stop it) it isn't true at all to say God did nothing about it. Quite the contrary, the 'bread crumbs' we have followed in this storm have been to us sweet, honey tasting 'manna' that has fed our parched souls until now. They have helped us believe that, taken alone, one single fact points simply to human death. In the same way that, taken alone, the Cross of Christ as a single incident, points simply to yet another Roman crucifixion. As a collective whole though, the 'bread crumbs' of incidents that surrounded Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection (the 'clues' of prophecy down through the ages), all prove beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus was and is the Christ. Likewise, the 'collective whole' of Mike's story that crossed him over from life to Life is nothing other than a God-given, loving-filled act not only toward Mike, but to those he left behind.

May God be glorified through this collection of amazing stories that recount His involvement in the intimate details of what has now become *our* family history.

2. THE HOLIDAY TO REMEMBER

It was January of 2009 and they had only just got done with a beach holiday when, quite unusually, my brother sat down at his computer to plan a holiday in the UK. I say 'unusually' because it isn't the normal behavior of anyone to come off a relaxing holiday only to plan the next one so soon. Surely you would wait for the fatigue of work to settle in before your mind begins to daydream again of some distant shore. On this occasion, the thought to go to England began on a Saturday and by Wednesday the tickets were booked to leave on August 2nd. In my brother's mind though, this trip was special. From the outset, he felt strongly that this was to be a different trip and that both he and his wife were to be 'available to follow God's lead' – whatever *that* meant.

It was the first time in 25 years my brother had made a trip to visit me outside Australia, and I of course was excited. I wrote a long e-mail in response, outlining all the places they should go while they were here. Slightly deflatingly, he responded with not wanting to plan anything. Instead, they wanted to 'be available' for whatever God should put before them.

Then in June, my church in Australia experienced a real set back. My Mission's Pastor had moved Missions Month from April to June, without an explanation why. She and another core member of the church both passed away in a matter of weeks in May and early June. As their longest serving missionary, and with the church naturally shaken, my Pastor recalled me home. I stayed with my brother for the remaining Sundays of our church's Missions Month and flew back to the UK in early July. It had been 25 years to the very week that my church had commissioned me in 1984, and sent me out with our missionary organization.

Unbeknown to me, my brother was secretly disappointed to see me!

He had spent all this money on a trip to England leaving August 2nd, and I was sitting in his kitchen in June! He had clearly misheard God! To console himself, he reasoned that: God had to have known in January (when he stood booking the flight for August) that I would be coming home in June. With this unfolding, he relented and booked some small site seeing items of interest for the first week they would be in the UK. Then hired a car to circle the south, before coming to me on August 10th.

But all this, coupled with a 'lack of excitement' for the trip (even as July approached), seemed to play on his melancholy tendencies. By Saturday August 1st (Friday night UK time) he had been thinking that he and his wife might die on this trip, but thought, "You can't just stay home because you are afraid in life." In preparation, he called his sons over on Saturday afternoon and, while the clock ticked on to the early hours of Saturday morning in England, he laid out on the kitchen table instructions concerning their Will and other directions for their sons and daughter-in-law.

By early evening, just hours before they were due to leave, (and by now drawing close to 8am UK time Saturday 1st August) my brother was still dragging his feet and sluggishly packing the remains of a suitcase. That night, there was a ladies meeting at a friend's house, and he suggested that his wife attend while he finished the last few tasks. In a phone call with our sister, he couldn't explain what was wrong with his attitude and could only say later, that 'the thrill' was missing from what should have been an exciting first-time adventure to our ancestral homeland.

It was only as he placed the suitcases on the lounge room floor and his phone rang, that he truly understood the nature of this long awaited trip that had been in the pipeline under God's direction since January.

As Mum's voice explained that Mark had found Michael dead at 8:05am (5:05pm Australian time), my brother knew in that instant that this was the plan and the purpose all along. As head of the home and 'father figure' since our father's death 10 years before, God knew my brother's place was at my side.

My sister-in-law had only just walked in the door of the ladies group when her mobile phone rang. To the bewilderment of everyone, and not explaining it even to her, my brother simply asked her to return home. It took him several minutes out on the driveway upon her return to 'get the words out'. But both knew this was God's plan for them all along: to be with me in this dark storm.

Had they planned to leave a day earlier, they would not have been able to change their itinerary booked for the south in that first week. Had Mike's 'departure' happened later, they would have been on the plane and out of contact until August 3rd, risking the loss of the cost of their hotel and car hire bookings down south. A seven month plan on God's part was timed with absolute precision and, with 1 hour of Sunday trading time before they were due at the airport, they were able to completely reverse their plans for the south and got a 'mirror image' of the itinerary at no extra cost. This put them in the north with me in the first weeks and in the south for the remaining days before going home. The ease with which all this fell into place with no detriment to any of the original plans (apart from an upgrade to a last-minute internal flight), was clearly a miracle!

As they stowed their hand luggage and settled into their seats, they prepared themselves for the whirlwind to follow, knowing that they were in the centre of God's will for their lives.

3. GENTLE PREPARATION

Mark had just come off the biggest project in our organization's 50 year history. He had made it to the finish line and watched our newest ship, sail down the river Thames from London and into her future: bringing Knowledge, Help and Hope to the nations of the world.

After coming home from the following Board and leadership meetings (and like standing on the finish line in a great stadium after an Olympic marathon watched *and scrutinized* by the world), he took stock of a broken rib here and a bloodied nose there. The momentum of the race had blinded him to the bruises and injuries sustained in completing it. It was a long 10 years and, like 'hitting the wall' in a marathon, the last 2 years of the project were the worst of all! He now had time in the quiet house to reflect on the cost to himself: the loss of his boss and close friend; the dissipation of the project team; and the natural moving on of core members of a once strong and bonded leadership group whose relationships have, for some, dated back the 30 years Mark had been with the organization.

On Friday afternoon July 31st in a personal e-mail to a few close friends from the original Executive Leadership Team (ELT) who had 'borne the heat of the day'³² of the new ship project and who watched God bring such a colossal project to fruition, he wrote these words: *"I realised in the last two weeks I am going through a **mourning process** and that **the "death" was sudden and unexpected.**"* These were the last words he wrote before shutting down his computer and coming home.

It seemed very clear that the end of both the project and the composition of the ELT as it was, marked the end to something far bigger than just the end of an endeavor. During that week he sent me a list of all the passwords necessary for accessing our internet bank files etc. and where our family finance stood. He thought something serious was going to happen to *him*.

This was a hard 'bread crumb' to swallow as the events of the following morning unfolded. With its stark reality, (especially in light of the *choice of words* in Mark's last e-mail) this and my brother's story above, showed us that God passed insight to the two most important men in my life through His Holy Spirit at work. Even if it was received as a shadowy 'vibe' of fragmented clues that couldn't be crystallized until the whole truth was fully known in the hours that were to come.

At the time of perhaps my greatest need yet, I knew that God was at work even in the painful events of life and labor, showing us His enduring presence ...even in the storm.

³² Matthew 20:12

4. I WANT TO GO HOME

As was their usual practice each year, Win and Peter were at a Christian Convention in the idyllic Cumbrian Lake District, North England. The convention (a Christian retreat for teaching, worship, and family holiday time), has been an annual gathering for more than 150 years. Set in one of the most beautiful parts of the English countryside, the teaching, worship, reflection, and additional youth camp time (away from the hustle and bustle of city life) proves to be a real ‘wellspring of living water’ for many with busy lives.

Since Peter was a core leader for the convention’s Trust, he took responsibility each year for the Guest Speakers. On the final Saturday of each year’s event, it was his usual practice to stay until the last of key note speakers left town, to ensure their travel arrangements ran smoothly for them, and that the start of their homeward journey (after an often tiring week for them) began without ‘hiccup’.

However as the final week of the 2009 summer convention grew on, Win experienced an increasing urge to get home. By the Friday, this inner feeling was so strong she just had to share it with Peter. *“I don’t know why I’m feeling this way. I just have to get home. I can go alone. You stay as long as you need to, but after the final meeting tonight, I just have to go.”*

She was feeling incredible silly because she couldn’t explain what the urgency was, especially when it was only a matter of little more than 12 extra hours! Analyzing it later she acknowledged that she had a very good week. So it was nothing to do with the meetings, or the crowds, or even being tired. It was more of an ever-present (and growing) sentiment that was by now compelling her to return home sooner than their usual Saturday afternoon plans. Slightly reluctantly, Peter consented to joining her. For the first time ever, he decided to say goodbye to those invited for key roles in the program, and join Win for their early departure home.

It wasn’t until Peter answered the phone at 8:20am on Saturday August 1st that they both grasped the full impact of the urgency to return home. Peter was the first person Mark called after the medics pronounced Mike dead, and their response was immediate.

Had they remained at the convention, I am sure that their response time would have only differed by 45mins but it was heartwarming to see their faces standing at the door in less than 10 minutes. Peter was able to take control of the situation after Mark’s initial calls to our two mothers. While Win made us a cup of tea, Peter was able to make all further phone calls necessary, and provide an initial buffer for us when all the incoming calls began. At one stage that morning all four phones: the land line, the internet line, and our two mobile phones (in addition to Peter’s personal mobile) were all ‘ringing off the hook’! Their compassionate and calming presence that day was like a sea anchor thrown out in a raging storm holding our ship in place.

Win’s growing unease as the week progressed, and Peter’s choice to join her at home earlier than planned, was something neither had experienced before in such a significant week for both of them. We can only think now that God in His wisdom was speaking into their hearts, moving them into place like strategic chess pieces, ready for the moment the ‘white squall’ smashed into our quiet lives.

5. HE’S JUST ASLEEP

The police woman came off her two-way radio and warned us that they were about to take Mike, and that if we wanted to get some time with him, we should do it now. Mark didn’t want to see him ‘like that’, so I went up to say goodbye alone.

Earlier, the emergency services had asked us to lift Mike down off the bed and onto the carpeted floor to give him heart massage until the ambulance arrived. Mikey lay at peace on the floor now, under his duvet with his stuffed dog ‘Ro-Ro’ on the pillow beside him. I knelt down on the floor beside Mike and, like Job³³, with my face on the ground and my hands lifted up - empty - I was determined to worship.

“For your sake Mike, for the sake of worship that you had your sights set on, I will be Job and worship God right here and right now. I am Hannah, Lord³⁴. I willingly hand over my only son to you. He is yours and of your own do I give You. But just You. No-one else but You. If You don’t have him Lord, I want him back. I’m only giving him over to You.”

³³ Job 1:13-22

³⁴ 1 Samuel 1:22

I lifted my head and stroked his eyebrows. He was my handsome boy – the ‘ruddy and handsome David’³⁵. I kissed him on the hair just above his ear and as I rose to look at him, his color returned ever so slightly, and I saw movement across his face like the movement of a mirage. It was as if I saw ‘a cloud as small as a man’s hand on the horizon’³⁶ in answer to my fervent prayers. I got up, went to the door and looked back. I could still see the movement on his face.

...

When Mike’s oldest sister flew home from the ship, we had the awful task of taking her through the process of seeing Mike at the funeral home. Mark and his mum went in first as a way of ‘breaking the ice’ for our daughter, and also for Mark who by now, wanted to see Mike again. He hadn’t seen Mike in 5 days and had missed him so much. Next, my brother, sister-in-law and I went in. As I approached the coffin, I saw once again his color return and a hint of movement rippled ever so slightly across his face. The rest of the visit was taken up with our daughter who was struggling to get through the door, and we eventually left when she was ready to go.

I had a restless night. I preferred to remember Mike in his own room, on his own pillow, lying under his own duvet with his stuffed dog next to him. The image of him in a lace covered casket, his lips that longed to praise God – (to learn how to sing as well as play his guitar at Nexus worship school – those lips I loved to kiss when he was small, and wished I could get near when he was older, only he wouldn’t let me) – those lovely lips were now sealed closed. This was utterly grievous. It wasn’t something I wanted imprinted on my mind. I wrestled till the early hours with God, as I sort to ‘re-print over’ unwanted impressions in my mind.

But even through all that (I was the first to bring him into the world and the last to see him leave the house), including the horrible, necessary process at the funeral home, God was God to me.

At the eye of the storm, God gave me ‘treasures of darkness stored in secret places’³⁷. In the stillness of death, He showed me something that I now believe Jesus saw on that young girl in Matthew 9 when He said, *“The girl is not dead but asleep.”*³⁸ We have since found a photo of Mike asleep in the car on our journey back from Mike’s Open Day and interview at Nexus Worship School. His mouth slightly ajar; eyes ever-so-slightly open. It’s the same face we saw that day... *Don’t cry, he’s just asleep.*

In that quiet place at the storm’s core, God in His mercy gave only me this one ‘bread crumb’: seeing life even on the face of death and it has sustained me ever since.

6. THE HORN OF GIDEON

I was surprised to hear her voice when I answered the phone. Ruth was a very close friend from our Australian church. Tentatively, she explained that God had impressed upon her heart something for Mike, who was around 12 years old at the time. She had done this once before for Mike’s older sister when we were out in Australia one year, giving her a ‘ring of commitment’ from God in response to what she felt was His direct instruction. Our daughter still wears that ring today. And so now, we felt confident we could trust that her words were sincere.

Ruth explained that she was reading the story of Gideon³⁹ and felt she should phone to tell us that Mike was somehow connected to Gideon – that he had what she could only describe as ‘a Gideon spirit’. Cryptic as it was, the message seemed to settle well with us, especially knowing that Gideon was a quiet man like Mike, and yet God saw passed this exterior and called him ‘a mighty warrior’.

I told Mike about the phone call and told him about the story of Gideon in the bible. Over the years, and as he was growing into a young man, I encouraged him that (even in shy people) God sees past the exterior and can see a brave and mighty warrior in him. At the age where he should be reading his bible for himself, I suggested he might start by reading stories like the story of Gideon.

It wasn’t until I’d mentioned this to Mark’s mum (and she got out the Bible to read the story in the days immediately after Mikey passed away) that I felt for the first time, I’d perhaps been focusing on Gideon himself and not on the full story.



The Young Warrior: Mike at 17

³⁵ 1 Samuel 16:12

³⁶ 1 Kings 18: 41-44

³⁷ Isaiah 45:3

³⁸ Matthew 9:24

³⁹ Judges 6 onward (and referencing v11)

In Judges 6:34 onward, Gideon blew a trumpet and the **mighty men of close relation** rallied to his side. Like manna from heaven and at the height of this raging storm, God seemed to say: these men had 'the Gideon spirit'. They not only heard the trumpet but the spirit within them 'rose up' as they immediately responded to the call.

In a postcard to his youth group after leaving home (rather suddenly) for a 6-month stint as a deck hand aboard our ship, Mike wrote: *"It's just like when Jesus said, 'Follow me.' Immediately, they **left their nets** and followed Him.⁴⁰"*

As the sun was rising on the morning of August 1st 2009, it was as if the King of Kings resounded Gideon's Ram's horn ...and our son went too.

7. THE GIFT OF FLOWERS

Mike didn't have a girl friend anytime in his life and we never really got to find out if there was anyone who had caught his special attention. At one point, I asked him if he liked a girl and, surprised that I should even *need* to ask, he said, 'You would be the first to know if I had a girl friend, I would bring her home. You would see her here.' He somehow naturally thought that the process was to bring them home probably even before going the next step to become 'officially' attached. This naïve, almost 'old fashioned' approach to dating made me smile. So when I found a large stuffed bear in his cupboard close on Christmas, and he said it wasn't for his sisters, I was intrigued. A week later, Mike had arranged to meet a girl in town, and the bear went too.

When a convenient moment came up, I asked if he liked this mystery girl and finding out he didn't, I gently explained how producing a rather expensive bear for her at Christmas, could be giving her the wrong vibes. (This seemed especially so when he told me she'd confided some particularly intimate details to him about her struggle with a bad relationship situation and her boyfriend's abuse.) But in the same way that he would treat and feel about his sisters, he said, "No, it's ok Mum. I just wanted to make her feel better."

...

The door bell rang and the happy face of the flower lady beamed up at me. "You're getting spoilt today!" she chirped as I received the two beautiful bouquets from her hand. She was only the delivery lady, and I wasn't about to ruin her happy morning by telling her what had just happened and why people were sending us flowers.

As I closed the door and turned to take them to the kitchen though, I did wonder about this concept of 'being spoilt'. After all, I was getting a real treat and I didn't deserve it. I've only once received flowers via Interflora® and that was when we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary and our special friends from America sent them. 'How fresh and beautiful,' I thought when the scent wafted around me as I walked to the kitchen. I couldn't help wonder who they were from as I set them down on the kitchen bench.

Just as they touched the work top, it was as if Mike was standing right next to my left elbow in the same way he always did (having heard the door bell and bounded in beside me to ask what it was that had just arrived). In that instant I heard him say, "There you are mum, these are to make you feel better."



Our pastor and his wife sat on the sofa, another friend close by, and Mark on a chair that faced the hallway. I was on the phone to Mike's older sister on the ship in the Caribbean. Explaining to her what I thought God had just done; what He may be saying; and how we should be responding, in a bid to calm her down in probably the worst storm she would hit in her life. I repeated the words of a Sunday school song learnt when I was a little girl:

*"Trust and obey,
For there's no other way,
To be happy in Jesus,
Then to trust and obey."*

As the conversation came to an end, I suggested I could pray for her. Hearing this from the lounge room, and without thinking of the guests talking to him, Mark stopped and bowed his head. Without any warning or thought at all in his mind for Mike to precipitate the following, he instantly heard the words, *"I'm ok, Dad."*

⁴⁰ Matthew 4:18-22

These were the only times in this storm that Mark and I felt a real sense of God giving us messages, as it were directly from Mike. We don't agree at all with the dead speaking and this is clearly not what I'm saying here. But like God taking on Eli's voice so that the boy Samuel was convinced three times that Eli himself had called to him⁴¹, God in His mercy gave us sweet, honey tasting manna in those two instantaneous moments that could not have been conjured up from our doing: to hear in Mike's voice what God Himself would want to say.

Thank-you God, for your generous and tender Love - even in the darkest hours of this storm.

8. QUIET TIMES

September 1990 – 3½ months before birth. *“To my baby. In honor of health and peace and in dedication to future life and happiness. May the face of God smile upon you in the innermost parts and bring you to fullness of life. Your Mother's love.”*

26/3/91 - 2 months old. *“I pray God will stand by His promise to save our whole house. I pray He will protect you against the lies of the devil and bring you safely through to fullness of life.”*

6/10/91 – Almost 9 months old – *“I love you incredibly and pray continually for God's protection over your life. Each day I want to come closer to Him in order to come closer to you... I do want to lift you up right now and ask God's grace to shine in your life. May He protect you from the evil one and draw you into His Kingdom.”*

- Prayers from Mike's diary I kept and wrote throughout his childhood -

Either I have a very weird daily bible reading book, or else God has a copy of it in heaven that He uses to speak to me precisely, and quiet frankly ‘uncannily’, at just the right moment. I sometimes wonder if He holds off events or bring events forward, to time them with my Quiet Time book that He knows I'll be reading either that day, in the days before, or soon after. I would recommend my book to you only I have owned it for at least 20 years (bought from our ship's bookshop in 1988) and copies may now be hard to come by⁴².

JOB

Our church was systematically going through the Old Testament [OT], beginning January 1st 2009. The idea was to read set chapters during the week with church notes attached. The Pastor would then speak on Sunday either on one topic covered in the reading plan, or give an overview talk on the whole section spanning that week.

Eight months after starting this complex task of covering the 39 books and 929 chapters of the OT over 365 days, and of all the books to cover right on this particular week-end, the story of Job landed on Sunday August 2nd - the day after I stood shaking (just as Job no doubt did) with our youngest daughter and Mark saying, “This is God. It has to be God. This doesn't happen. It's too weird *not* to be God.”

My quiet time book put Job 1 on July 22nd and covered God's response to Job on July 23rd. This is what I wrote 9 days before Job's storm hit my house:

*“Dear Lord, Job had a lot more to worry about than me. He had everything he loved and owned taken away from him in a single day. I could say that happened to me 25 years ago when I first left Australia to join our missionary organization, or when we lost everything we had except the cloths we stood up in on the day our ship ran aground. But Job went on from there and lost 10 children, then was infected with unthinkable sores for 40 days. God said [to satan], “Everything he has is in your hands. But on the man himself, do not lay a finger.” Satan couldn't have disobeyed God on his own, so why wasn't the wife struck down and Job freed? The very thing he prayed against for his children [Job1:5], she cajoled him to do himself! [Job2:9] She doesn't seem a brilliant wife, ... Lord have mercy on me and my family.... I thank you for the hope there is in the words of Job and that you will **protect us as far as we can cope with it.**”*

As our daughter, Mark and I stood clutching each other in our bedroom while the medics worked on Mike, my mind immediately visualized Job's shocked face as he rose to his feet with each wave of destruction that hit him on that fateful day. Like Job, I could only say, “God is in control. God did this. God gives and He takes away. No-one can take Mike's breath away except God. *“...the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed*

⁴¹ 1 Samuel 3:1-10

⁴² QUIET TIMES *A complete day-by-day Guide to Personal Worship & Bible Study* - Max E. Anders: Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers Inc. Brentwood

into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being."⁴³ The book of Job taught me that no-one can take away someone's breath (certainly not in the way it happened to Mike) except God who gave it in the first place. At God's command as Sustainer of the universe, the sustaining power that brought Mike life was withdrawn.

I found myself that first Sunday morning in church, (the only place on earth I wanted to be) opening the scriptures to feed on the 'bread crumbs' in my 'out-of-body' surreal state. Allowing the story of Job being re-told from the pulpit, to wash around me, and over me, and through me, as I determined *not to be Job's wife*, but to worship God as Job did – as Mike would want me to.

PSALM 90

Three days before Mike left us, my Quiet Time book covered Psalm 90. As my eyes passed over the words: *"⁴⁰ The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away."* I could hear the strain of a violin floating to me across eternity. It pulled at my heart strings and caused a lump in my throat. I remembered hearing that music as I read the final chapter of the Chronicles of Narnia story "The Silver Chair". The same music had drifted across time from the distant land of Narnia far beyond the western horizon, as they stood watching the dead King Caspian lay resting on the river bed in Aslan's country.

I hadn't realised that Moses had written this Psalm. I was one of those people who assumed that all the Psalms were written around King David's time. If they weren't written by David, it didn't matter who wrote them. Who reads the heading at the top anyway? Isn't it the words that count? Now I realised Moses had penned this prayer and it was called *'The Prayer of Moses'*. Just like me, he had a quiet time and wrote down prayers. I wondered if he'd written this on parchment and I imagined it hanging on a wall of his tent. Perhaps he read it each morning before facing the 'trouble and sorrow' each day that came with his leadership. My mind went to Mark. This is the life of the leader and the length, (the 'span of leadership years') is determined by the strength you have to endure them.

However, my quiet time focused on the absence of 'trouble and sorrow' in my life: *"Lord, I do thank you today. I thank you for the sun pouring in my window. Thank you for my life. I'm a lucky person. I have a newly decorated lounge room, new TV, freshly shampooed carpets throughout. Lord you are a great & awesome God. Your mercies endure forever. **In your mercy you have heard all my prayers** and I live a life of luxury and peace. Like Mark's grandmother would often say, "I have a lot to be thankful for." Lord thank-you for the sun shine. Thank-you that today I can contemplate painting, and sawing, and fixing, and not be worried about money. You are a great and awesome God. I live a lucky life."*

...

I didn't have a quiet time for 5 days after the storm hit but as I crawled into bed after that tumultuous day, that changed our family forever, I remembered saying, *"What's changed God? The only thing that's changed is: Mike's not here. We were all splashing about in the swimming pool and Mike got out of the pool. You are still God, and I will still praise you. For the sake of Mike and his desire to worship you, I **will** praise you."*

PROVERBS 1

It was 11pm 5 days later when I made my way to bed. I wasn't exactly tired so I got out my quiet time book. The book is dated for each day, but for the life of me, I couldn't think what day it was! My Pastor was arriving the next morning from Australia so from there, I figured it was August 5th. However, as I turned the pages back, I found myself counting back to the day Mike left. The last turn of the page brought me to August 1st and then I remembered I'd asked someone on that infamous day what date it was. The second thing I noticed was that it was a new section in the book. Then I read the chapter. God had, in a very powerful way, left me a message on the day He took my son.

It was as if it could have been a personal letter written from God to Mike and I saw the chapter in four parts. The first part v1-7 explaining what a proverb is, and probably an introduction to the whole book so that when God gets to the core of what he wanted to say to Mike, he started with honoring Mark and I: *"⁸ Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. ⁹ They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck."*

Like the entrusting of Jesus into the hands of Joseph and Mary, God paid great and undeserved honor to us as He placed Mark and I in high esteem through these words on this of all days. With tears flowing, I recounted to Mark how I felt that God was saying: one day we'll see Mike again and he'll be wearing that garland on his head

⁴³ Genesis 2:7

and the chain on his neck that *we* gave him. In some cultures at the time this was written, garlands on the head and chain on the neck was literally *all* that was worn for clothing! God Himself will dress Mike in white⁴⁴ but it seemed to me that He would adorn Mike with what we imparted to him: those invisible qualities of biblical teaching and instruction.

All along I'd wondered if I prayed enough with Mike or read enough of the bible to him. I never knew if he'd even pray on his own. How much of the bible did he know? But here, God was pouring out His love, firstly to honor us as Mike's parents (even though the rest of the chapter clearly puts God as Father) and then to actually incorporate our input into the design of Mike's invisible (therefore probably eternal) attire.

The second thing that struck me was *what* God was saying to Mike. That God was clearly calling Mike His *son* and that everything God asked him to avoid, Mike had avoided⁴⁵. A whole other 'bread crumb' came from this thought, and you can read about it in the story below entitled: "Who Ate the Biscuits?!" Suffice to say, God was giving us a clear message on the day Mike died: that he had attained all what he had been asked to attain and that in a sense he'd 'peaked' and left at the best time he could. I thanked God that unlike King Solomon (even with all his wisdom), Mike didn't live long enough to 'muff it' in his adult life. Right before his crucifixion Jesus prayed, "*My prayer is **not that you take them out of the world** but that you **protect them from the evil one**.*"⁴⁶ I stood firmly on Jesus own pray and prayed all Mike's life (for him and his sisters) that God would protect them from the evil one. But maybe '*protecting Mike from the evil one*' **was** to 'take him out of this world'.

The third thing that was very powerful about this passage that fell directly on the day Mike left was v20-33. It was as if Mosses or Joshua was dying and they were leaving one last powerful speech. I could see 'wisdom' standing in the main street of our town and calling out...

"²⁰ Wisdom calls aloud in the street, she raises her voice in the public squares; ²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out, in the gateways of the city she makes her speech: ²² "How long will you simple ones love your simple ways? How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate knowledge? ²³ If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. ²⁴ But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, ²⁵ since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, ²⁶ I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you- ²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and trouble overwhelm you. ²⁸ "Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me. ²⁹ Since they hated knowledge and did not choose to fear the LORD, ³⁰ since they would not accept my advice and spurned my rebuke, ³¹ they will eat the fruit of their ways and be filled with the fruit of their schemes. ³² For the waywardness of the simple will kill them, and the complacency of fools will destroy them; ³³ but whoever listens to me will live in safety and be at ease, without fear of harm."

In my imagination, I could see a messenger standing in the pedestrianized precinct outside Mike's work. I quietly wondered how Mike's story and the message of God's existence be used openly to impact the city where Mike lived and died.

There was one other interesting thing to mention about the reading for August 1st in my Quiet Time book. It was something I'd missed for several months before discovering it. There are further bible verses each day to help you pray (intercede for the world) ask for other things, and praise (thank God). These extra bible passages are then repeated throughout the year: a sort of tool to remind you of key truths that, in time, become familiar to you if repeated regularly. The verse that reads: "*This is the day the Lord has made, we will rejoice and be glad in it*"⁴⁷ is repeated twelve times and positioned on the 5th day of every month - except one. For some reason only known to the original author, the pattern changed for August and (different from all the other months) he chose to place this verse on August 1st instead!! A peculiar 'co-incidence' in a 20 year old book - the probability of which someone else could work out, if they take the time. Or was it something other than mere 'co-incidence'? Some important communication perhaps, known only to God. Something He left there especially for us in an extreme hour of need, on the very day we needed it, telling us that He has even made this day too. And that if we choose to trust Him, we can rejoice and be glad in it.

*"What's changed God? The only thing that's changed is: Mike's not here.
We were all splashing about in the swimming pool and Mike got out of the pool.
For the sake of Mike and his desire to worship you, I **will** choose to trust and even praise you."*

⁴⁴ Revelation 7:9

⁴⁵ Proverbs 1:10-19

⁴⁶ John 17:15

⁴⁷ Psalm 118:24

LAMENTATIONS 3

There are 66 books in the bible and 1189 chapters but there are only 365 chapters that have the possibility of being picked to feature in my Quiet Time book. There are 365 days in a year but only 52 weeks to cover the 66 books, if my Quiet Time book is to give a good overview of the bible and God's teaching for anyone seeking to have a daily Bible reading, as the title denotes. There is only one book in the bible where the children of Israel expressed real 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' and my Quiet Time book gave only one chapter for this heart wrenching book in the whole year. Max E. Anders chose Lamentations 3 for August 12th in a book I bought 20 years ago. ...This was what God knew I'd be reading on the day we buried our son:

*"¹³ He pierced my heart with **arrows from His quiver**..."*

*²¹ Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the LORD's great love **we are not consumed**, for his compassions never fail...*

*²⁴ I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion; therefore **I will wait for him**..."*

*²⁷ It is good for a man to **'bear the yoke'** while he is young...*

*³² **Though He brings grief, He will show compassion**, so great is his unfailing love.*

*³³ **For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief** to the children of men...*

*³⁷ **Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?***

*³⁸ **Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?**"*

On the day we were to commit to the ground our only son whom we love, in him we were well pleased⁴⁸, I couldn't help but feel that God was telling us He knew how we felt. He took ownership for our grief [v13, 37 & 38] but He has not willingly brought this affliction on us [v33]. It was even good for Mike to leave early [v27]. Though this is hard to bear, God will show compassion [v32]. Now, in the spirit of Job, King David and all the great men of old, and because of the Lord's great love and His compassions that never fail [v22] we will say to ourselves, *"The Lord is our portion; therefore we will wait for him"* [v24].

*"It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*⁴⁹

These so-called 'co-incidents' that have happened, have led us to believe beyond reasonable doubt that God was fully involved in sustaining, and ceasing to sustain, Mike. Through these extraordinary occurrences during the month of August 2009, we came to see and hear His supernatural communication with us. By them, He has sustained us with 'manna from heaven' - His *bread crumbs* in this storm.

9. I WILL PRAISE YOU IN THIS STORM

Mike's older sister had mentioned a song they sang on the ship on the morning the news broke of Mike's death. It was about praising God in the storm, and we wondered if Mike had it in his music collection. Over the first days we scanned Mike's room for his MP3 player and at the time, I presumed it was to find this song about a storm.

Mike had been given an iPod for his 18th. When Mike's sister turned this on for the first time, the song highlighted was *Saviour King*⁵⁰ from Hillsong Australia. This was the last song that Mark found Mike playing on his guitar in his room just 12 hours before he left us. It seems to be the last song he listened to on his iPod, and we used this song in his 'Celebration of Praise' thanksgiving service.

We were now looking for Mike's MP3 player and it seemed that it had been 'shelved' somewhere - no doubt under his bed! As far as we knew, he hadn't used his MP3 in months. The songs he had loaded to it were songs that caught his interest from 15yrs onward. But neither Mark nor I were keen on moving anything around in his room to find it. It was his younger sister who eventually found it, producing it like the find of a lost treasure! Mark put the MP3 next to his bed and planned to listen through it when he had time.

It was by now Friday night. Our oldest daughter, Mark and Uncle Bill were out by the fire in the garden and I was heading to bed. Mark came to check on me. I was Ok, but as he was leaving the room he turned and said, "I just wanted to say that tomorrow is Saturday. It'll be one week since last Saturday morning. I just wanted you to be ready, it might be hard. Are you Ok about that?"

⁴⁸ Matthew 3:17

⁴⁹ Matthew 4:4

⁵⁰ <http://eu.hillsongmusic.com/saviour-king/>

“Oh,” I said, “I’m not like that. I wouldn’t have a clue what day of the week it is now, much less time and date ‘milestones’ like that. I’m Ok.”

But I hadn’t been Ok any of the nights. I have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the night and weirdly, it’s always around 3am. Every night I hated walking past Mike’s bedroom door and that night was no different. I slept for 3 hours and was wide awake at 2am. My stirring must have alerted Mark to me being awake, as he was. We ended up talking and praying and grappling and discussing so that by 4am I suggested making tea and toast.

When I returned, Mark was in tears and said he’d just had a ‘God-moment’. He reached for the MP3, went click, click, click and the first song was the very song our daughter had mentioned...

*I was sure by now
God you would have reached down
And wiped our tears away
Stepped in and saved the day
But once again, I say “Amen”, and it’s still raining
As the thunder rolls
I barely hear You whisper through the rain
“I’m with you”
And as Your mercy falls
I raise my hands and praise the God who gives
And takes away
I’ll praise You in this storm
And I will lift my hands
For You are who You are
No matter where I am
Every tear I’ve cried
You hold in Your hand
You never left my side
And though my heart is torn
I will praise You in this storm
I remember when
I stumbled in the wind
You heard my cry
You raised me up again
My strength is almost gone
How can I carry on
If I can’t find You...*

*...I lift my eyes unto the hills, Where does my help come from?
My help comes from the Lord - The Maker of Heaven and Earth*

“Praise You in This Storm” – by Casting Crowns⁵¹

As we wept through these extraordinarily fitting words in this amazing song, we wondered who this boy was, and what 15-17 year old would load his MP3 with such a powerful song? But more than that, our minds were blown away by God’s timing. Seven nights later (and probably to the very hour Mike left) Mark found this song, left for us by Mike to help us Praise his God in this Storm. Our son wanted to become a Worship Leader like those he listened to. Now he was leading us into worship in perhaps the greatest storm of our lives.

The song became a kind of ‘theme song’ over the coming days. It led us into profound worship in unfathomable grief. On the morning of August 12th I listened to it over and over again at high volume while trying to do my hair through the tears, when getting dressed for Mike’s funeral.

In the darkness of our room before the dawn of that second Saturday morning, only God Himself could have planned and timed this poignant ‘find’ right down to the moment so precisely. To give us this ‘bread crumb’ left behind by our beloved son to feed on and to be sustained by, as we began our long journey back to faith and hope in Him.

⁵¹ <https://castingcrowns.com/music/lifesong-live>

10. THE FUNERAL DRESS

It was 5am when my Australian Pastor phoned me. Her voice was firm. “Kath, I’ve thought about it,” she said, “what would you think about coming home.” My Missions Pastor was the second to pass away in a matter of weeks, and our church in Australia had taken a clear beating. My mind raced onto a looming Tax exam in the coming week that I’d just ‘worked my tail off’ to revise for. This would be the second time I would postpone it. Then the week after, there was the ‘grand finale’ prepared in London that would launch our latest and largest ship. We’d been waiting and preparing 5 years for this moment. ...But all this took a back seat in that one moment. I phoned Mark (who was aboard our ship in Wales at the time) to begin arrangements for returning home.

The next hours were spent on the internet getting the next available ticket for a flight to Australia on Sunday, and by Saturday afternoon I was standing in a shop trying on a dress to wear for Jean’s funeral.

Mark came home to be with the kids and after showing him the dress (and looking in this mirror and that mirror) I decided I would return it to the shop. I don’t buy clothes that often, and this seemed too glamorous for a funeral. In hindsight, I was probably silly to think such things but I gave Mark my credit card and the receipt and asked him to return the outfit on the Monday.

In the early days of the following month, Mark and I were in the car on the way home from the airport. As usual, Mark was ‘filling me in’ on all the comings and goings of the past 4 weeks while I was away, when he happened to say that the shop wouldn’t take the dress back. I immediately figured I’d keep it for some other occasion (it was the sort of dress that would be right for one of our Ship Project Donor events. I could see myself wearing it while drinking a cup of tea at a finger food buffet reception. But then Mark clarified: “They gave me a credit note instead. They also want you to use it in the next 6 months.” That was a real pain. I never shop there and unfortunately the dress was a little bit too much money to waste on a mistake. After apologizing to Mark, I settled for making the situation of an unnecessary purchase work somehow, and hoped that I would find something in their shop in a few weeks.

By the end of the first week home, and now 5 weeks since I first bought the dress, we decided to check out the shop. When I went in, I asked about the outfit - it seemed to be the only thing I liked in that shop! She had one left. I then handed her the receipt and explained to her that I’d actually bought different sizes of each of the three pieces that made up the outfit. She would have to check what I originally bought, to see if those sizes were the same as the dress that hung on the rack. Each piece was the same size! She then noticed the tags were torn and said, “You know, I think this is the same dress that you returned.” I couldn’t believe it! This doesn’t happen. “The same dress 5 weeks later” I marveled, as I put it into a dry cleaning bag and hung it in my wardrobe.

...

As I stood in front of my wardrobe ‘spaced out’ from the tornado that hit our home, I mindlessly wondered what I would put on just to eat breakfast! Had I not had my brother and his wife down stairs; Mark’s mum about to arrive for breakfast from where we’d housed her down the street; or my Pastor, her husband and my two sisters, due to walk over mid-morning from their accommodation, I would simply walk around in a dressing gown and ride out the day under a blanket on the sofa – or simply stay in bed and not get up at all!

As my ‘wrung out brain’ scanned the cloths hanging in my wardrobe, my eyes alighted on a blue dry cleaner’s bag. I knew exactly what was inside.

Like the find of some amazing treasure, I immediately went down stairs with the prized bag, to recount my story to the others. Two months after purchasing a funeral dress that wasn’t suitable for the one funeral, and with the tags still on, I produced the dress that would be perfect for my son. A son who had just completed ‘basic training’ on planet earth; received his graduation certificate from his youth group; and possessed a letter of full recommendation for the ship’s captain, was now to have his ‘passing out ceremony’.

With his father wearing a Hawaiian shirt; his sisters dressed in beautiful dresses; this dress (while not suitable for my friend’s funeral), would be exactly the sort of dress a parent would wear on the decks of a huge aircraft carrier in Pearl Harbor to attend their son’s ‘passing out ceremony’ as he passes from basic training on earth, into His Majesty’s Royal Service in eternity.

Bought for intention, returned to the shop, left for 5 weeks and then re-bought again, the funeral outfit had taken a long journey before finding its original and rightful purpose. Though I had no idea at the time, it was a use that no doubt *God knew of* from that very first day, when I stood trying it on in the store’s changing room two months earlier.

As I returned the dry cleaning bag to my wardrobe to await that very special day three days hence, I couldn't help thinking that this was only one of the many 'co-incidences' that, taken as a collective whole, were never co-incidental in the first place. Instead, they showed us God's controlling hand as He organized even the smallest details and arranged for us to receive His 'bread crumbs' in this storm.

11. WHO ATE THE BISCUITS?!

The danger in loosing one of your prized possessions is that you could end up painting them in a different light than what was in fact, reality. You tend to 'deify' those you love most when you no longer have them left to love.

I was in the shower when my mind wandered onto Hebrew 9:27: "... *man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment...*" From scripture we know there is a judgement day or: "Day of the Lord"⁵² with a judge⁵³, and if that's the case, then there must be an accuser⁵⁴. But who are the witnesses? Is there a jury? If I had a chance to testify at Mike's judgement I would say, "This one did nothing wrong." I had to catch myself because only Jesus was without sin. (No sin was found that could be brought against him at his crucifixion. The written charge against Him - the reason why He was sentenced to death - read not what he had *done* wrong, but instead who He *was*⁵⁵.) So then, if only Jesus could be found without any charge that could be brought against Him, what *was* wrong with Mike?

Mike had one sin that I knew of. He seemed to have a problem lying over who ate the biscuits.

Looking back, it could have been my fault for asking, "Who ate *all* the biscuits?" The packet was empty but Mike could rightly say, "It wasn't me", if he hadn't eaten *all* the biscuits i.e. he only ate *most* of them – or – *the last* of them! I remember standing outside his room a few years before telling Mark, "I think Mike has a problem with lying." I'm not sure what I expected Mark to do but it was infuriating finding wrappers in Mike's bin after he said it wasn't him!

...I stopped typing this story to make myself a cup of tea and opened the snack cupboard to find the plastic biscuit barrel bearing the words, "Lunch Box Only! ☹ Dad". He even drew a 'sad face' next to his exclamation mark!

How I wish now for that biscuit barrel to be found empty - just for one last time.

I'd give all the biscuits in the world to have Mike home for one more day, just to eat them all.

...I threw the barrel out...

...

Auntie Sue arrived from Australia a few days after Mike left us. As soon as she sat down, Mike's youngest sister appeared from her room. Then, in a 'baby voice' mimicking a child of about 5yrs, the first thing Auntie Sue said was, "Who ate the last biscuit?!" She then told us a story of how our daughter (who was visiting Sue's house in Australia one year), became a 'policeman' after finding that the last biscuit on the plate was taken by someone. Like the 'Spanish Inquisition', she had gone about the house and out into the garden, interrogating all the children in a bid to track down the perpetrator of the crime: the person who so rudely ate the last biscuit! By the end of my sister's 'laugh', I told Sue that her story had just taken an amazing 'twist'.

All their childhood, I had a real problem with lies from my kids. I didn't mind if one of my kids ate the biscuits, I just wanted to know *who* ate them so that I could tell them *not* to. Because they wouldn't eat their supper, or that those biscuits were for their lunch boxes and not for eating now. All 'hell broke loose' when they'd lie about it! It would then erupt into pure volcanic activity if I found the wrappers in someone's waste paper basket – namely the one in Mike's bedroom!

It was close to supper time on Friday July 31st when Mark and Mikey had finished cutting back the climber on the back of the house. Mark (who has a nut allergy and ordinarily doesn't eat chocolate) had bought himself a packet of Cadbury's chocolate finger biscuits earlier in the week to treat himself with, as he sipped coffee in a break from painting our lounge room. When he first put them in the cupboard, he gave two to Mike, two to Mike's younger sister, and he even gave me two before saying, "Ok these are mine now, no-one eat them." Since we were late preparing supper that night, Mark decided to have a coffee with one of his 'prized biscuits', but the cupboard was bare!!!

⁵² Hebrews 9:27 (Further Refs: Ecclesiastes 11:9; Daniel 7:22; Zephaniah 1:2; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 10:15, 11:21-24 & 12:36; Romans 2:5; 2 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:7; 1 John 4:17; Jude 1:6.

⁵³ Psalm 9:8, 58:11, 75:7 & 110:6; Isaiah 28:6; John 5:22; Acts 10:42; Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:17, 2:23 & 4:5; Revelation 18:8 & 19:11.

⁵⁴ Revelation 12:10

⁵⁵ Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26.

I was painting something in the kitchen when Mark called out, “Ok, who ate my biscuits?!” Instantly, Mike appeared from the lounge room and said, “I ate the last four.” We were shocked! All we could do was stand there praising him for his honesty. No-one knows what happened to that biscuit conversation, nor whether or not Mark got his cup of coffee after all! The idea of Mike confessing so freely without being questioned a second time, was enough to blow all of us away!

As I stood in the bathroom some mornings later, milling over the concept of judgement, (and if I were to be called forward as a witness on Mike’s life before the Judge of the World) I would say, “This boy was without sin. He did nothing wrong to us and we’re the closest ones to him. Even that one vice, that ‘thorn in the flesh’⁵⁶ he *did* have, was mastered on his last day on earth.”

With the sanctifying (cleansing/training) work of the Holy Spirit in operation all our lives until the day we die (so that we can be presented to God without fault⁵⁷), could it be that God waited for that last sin to be mastered, before He deemed Mike ready to be taken? Even if it was only another ‘strange co-incidence’, we took that amazing event (less than 12 hours before he died) as yet another ‘bread crumb’ sent directly from God as we marvelled at His goodness in the events of Mike’s final hours on earth.

12. SAVED THROUGH FAITH

Since Mike was so quiet, my biggest worry was: where he stood with God. Yes, he spent all of his spare time playing his guitar to Christian worship music, but was that a good enough indication that he was ‘acceptable’? He had been dedicated as a baby but he hadn’t been baptised and after ‘gentle encouragement’ at 12 years old (that his sister called ‘scaring him into it’), I backed off and simply prayed that God’s Holy Spirit would encourage him to do it. If it was that important to God, surely *He* needed to prompt Mike and get him to *want* to be baptised.

Nine days before Mike left, I read how Job offered sacrifices for his children after each of their parties, just in case they “sinned and cursed God in the hearts”⁵⁸. I wondered what sacrifice I could make for my kids. For Mike, I thought of baptism and I had pictured his Uncle and Dad baptising him at his church. I thought of prompting Mike with the topic of baptism once more. But I didn’t get a chance. What was ‘weird’ was that Mike’s church had a baptism service planned for the week *after* Mike left! None of us could have guessed that my brother and Mark’s role together, was not to lower him into the waters of baptism but instead, to lower Mikey into the ground.

As soon as the police left the house that momentous morning, I pulled aside Mike’s Pastor and quietly asked about the theology held by Mike’s Church on Jesus words: “*Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Holy Spirit.*”⁵⁹ God must have known this was playing on my mind and to quieten my fears, He not only gave us the ‘bread crumb’ in the last chapter, (the mastering of Mike’s ‘thorn in the flesh’⁶⁰ on his last day here), but He also gave us the following...

Bible Reading on the day Mike died - August 1st - “*My son, if sinners entice you, do not give in to them. If they say, ‘Come along with us; let’s lie in wait for someone’s blood, let’s waylay some harmless soul; let’s swallow them alive, like the grave, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; we will get all sorts of valuable things and fill our houses with plunder; throw in your lot with us, and we will share a common purse’- my son, do not go along with them, do not set foot on their paths; for their feet rush into sin, they are swift to shed blood. How useless to spread a net in full view of all the birds! These men lie in wait for their own blood; they waylay only themselves! Such is the end of all who go after ill-gotten gain; it takes away the lives of those who get it.*”⁶¹

This passage was set in my daily Quiet Time book for the day Mike passed away and with it, God was telling me that ‘his son’ Mike, did everything asked of him. He stayed away from trouble and kept his life clean. By showing us this passage at this crucial moment, God was confirming that:

- (i) Mike was *God’s* son⁶² and
- (ii) he was a pleasing son: a ‘good and faithful servant’⁶³.

⁵⁶ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (Referencing v7)

⁵⁷ Jude 1:24

⁵⁸ Job 1:5

⁵⁹ John 3:5

⁶⁰ 2 Corinthians 12:1-10 (Referencing v7)

⁶¹ Proverbs 1:10-19

⁶² John 1:12-13

⁶³ Matthew 25:21

August 2nd – “*The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour. Such is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek your face, O God of Jacob.*”⁶⁴

A close friend sent us this passage in the Psalm 24 on August 2nd as we sat listening to the teaching on Job in church on that first Sunday morning. By it, we were sure that God was confirming that Mike had ‘*clean hands*’ and as such, was able to ‘*ascend the hill of the Lord*’ and ‘*stand in His holy place*’.

Next to this is Psalm 23. It fell to me, at Dad’s funeral 10 years before, to read Psalm 23. Now here in the scriptures, my father and my son lay side by side. We included Psalm 24 as the Bible Reading in the ‘Celebration of Praise’ memorial service on the day we buried our son.

13. THE PERFECT NUMBER

The event of death and the burial of a loved one is one of the worst events anyone has to go through at any time in life. Not only are you in shock, but you have to go through the ridiculous conversation of what songs to sing at a church service!! Praise God that Mike’s departure led to inquest, which gave us extra days before the funeral was to be set. How is it possible to think clearly at a time like this! One horrible conversation we had to have was, whether or not we were to bury or cremate Mike. The funeral director was clearly gifted for this horrible situation and very, very kind in his approach and manner. But this topic had more ‘baggage’ attached to it than any of us realized.

In the 25 years since leaving home, my June trip back to Australia was the closest I’d ever come to seeing ‘light at the end of the tunnel’ and thinking that God was sending us home. At 19, I had committed to following God anywhere He went. I just forgot to mention *how long*!! After getting time with a core person in our lives in Australia, I came back to tell Mark about a job offer there and we laid this option at God’s feet. Having said that, I would be the first to be worried to leave the UK, and would only want to return home if we *all* knew this was the right move: that God was leading us in this way. Now my ‘life dream’ exploded in my face in this one horribly devastating event. How on earth could I leave now? What, leave Mike here?! I never thought we’d be going without Mike!

We went through a tearful hour of discussion as we went through all the options. Both of us erred on the side of burial but I wanted to take Mike with us when we finally moved. By the end of it, I had to resign myself to the concept of ‘the missionaries of old’ who went to China and Africa, burying their kids along the way. God was asking me to do this now, and I had to come to terms with a future flight home that would see the green fields of the Scottish Border lands disappear under my feet and what should have been a very happy event for me when it finally happens, would now be an event bathed in tears, as we leave our dearly beloved son behind.

But the ‘bread crumbs’ still fell as God sent us special manna from heaven to tell us *He knows*. And that He wants us to be ‘soothed’ by His loving grace and unfailing compassion (even to such undeserving people as the likes of us, especially when He has an entire world to busy Himself with at this time).

We were about to leave on a break with the two girls when Mark gathered up the papers related to Mike, to be put away till we returned. He was looking at the coroner’s letter that said, “...in order to confirm the cause of death...” (where he had underscored the word ‘confirm’). Mark connected this with an earlier phone conversation the coroner had with me over confirming that the death was ‘natural’ even if it was ‘unascertained’, before signing it off. While he was looking at that paper, I had the temporary death certificate in my hand when I noticed the reference number.

This coroner deals with a significantly wide area across the north of our county (the largest in the UK) and the reference number used is a computer generated number: the next number in line. He then finishes the number with the year i.e. xxxx-2009. This means that the numbers start at 1 again in 2010. It would relate to the number of deaths that are referred to him for further investigation in the whole of the north of the county and Mike’s death was the next in line.

Of all the possible reference numbers Mike could have been given between 0 and 9999 in the year 2009, Mike’s departure was timed precisely to occur, to be referred to this coroner, and to be given the next number: 777.

⁶⁴ Psalm 24:1-6

The full number was 0777-2009. My faith was nurtured under the Armageddon theology of the late 70s and early 80s where 7 meant something to the average Christian. (So did the millennium and Y2K but that's beside the point.)

Eternal life is based purely and simply on forgiveness. God forgiving us and allowing us 'in the door'. After being asked how many times we should forgive someone, Jesus answered, "*I tell you, not **seven times**, but **seventy-seven times**.*"⁶⁵

God stamped Mike's death papers three times with His perfect number, seven hundred and seventy-seven ...a 'bread crumb' sent just for us to find, and to smile at the irony of, in what would normally be an utterly desperate, dark and stormy hour.

14. THE 50 DAYS TO PENTECOST

I remember the warmth of my brother's arm around me when I sat on the sofa clutching my stomach as if in deep pain, weeping for my treasured son: the son that I love; my only son in whom I am well pleased. With my eyes closed, it was easy to be transported back in time to another day when another mother sat bent over, clutching *her* stomach and weeping till there was no energy left in any cell of her body. The three crosses stood ahead and at some distance from me. Several meters from me and a little to the right, was a pile of women. Like a pile of rag dolls they had cried out all their tears, and were laying in a heap together not caring who was sitting on who's feet, nor who was sitting on them. The standing group had simply imploded onto each other and now lay softly whimpering as the clouds began to gather and darkness began to fall.

I have never wept over the Cross of Christ like I wept that day⁶⁶ – the day I lost my own son. I could only thank God that I didn't have to see his flesh torn from his body and his blood stained face resting lifeless on his chest as he hung so mercilessly from a cruel cross. But what caught my attention at that moment was another pile. This was about the same distance from me as the pile of women, but slightly to my left. It was a pile of dead angels, only they weren't dead at all. Like the pile of women, (and having being commissioned *not* to intervene) they too had cried out all their tears and lay lifeless in grief, unable to move – unable to pull the strength together to move. I felt God saying, "*I know how you feel.*" I could only thank God that none of this happened to Mike.

On the third day, I rose up before daylight as the women in the bible had done⁶⁷. I didn't do it deliberately. I was awake from 3:30am that Monday thinking of Mary going to embalm her son, as I would have to do in preparing Mike's cloths for his burial. By 4.30am, I got up so as not to disturb Mark who was snoring at the time. (How I loved the sound of that snore – the first time in our marriage I welcomed it.) In the summer here, we have long sun rises. The sun seems to skim the horizon for an hour before it breaks over the tree line. I sat in our conservatory till after 6am, watching the clouds change into a beautiful rose red before the house began to come to life. I prayed that God would perform a 'jail break' at dawn as He had done for His own son. A hospital door is far easier to open than rolling away a large stone guarded by a dispatchment of ruthless Roman Centurion. God even opened the doors in the jailhouse and loosed the chains for Paul and Silas⁶⁸. If an earthquake had struck our town at that moment, I would have been the first in the car heading for the hospital mortuary! When the autopsy was then delayed another two days, I prayed again for Mike's return, but was also prepared to let God keep him.

My theological studies showed me many 'types' of Christ in the Old Testament including the big one in Genesis 22 where Abraham almost lost Isaac, his only son left with him. We don't hesitate to say that this one was like Jesus, or that one's experience was like Jesus. These stories pointed to something beyond the person and their actual circumstances or life events – a bigger picture to consider.

In our Summer Newsletter sent out just days before Mike passed away, I wrote, "*One thing that seems to happen in scripture is the 'seasons in time'. God times things with precise detail. Saul and David were both 30 when they became King; Jesus Lordship was made visible at 30, when He started His ministry. Moses, Saul, David & Solomon all served Israel for 40 years. Judah was exiled for 70 years and in AD70 the last temple was destroyed.*" Samuel *'grew in stature and in favor with God and man'*⁶⁹ He was the only other person in the bible who was attributed those words outside of Jesus.

But what about the future? Are we allowed to have a 'type' of Christ now? We are taught to be 'Christ-like' in all

⁶⁵ Matthew 18:22

⁶⁶ The entire week from the time we found him to the time we committed him to the ground melted into one unending 'day'.

⁶⁷ Matthew 28:1

⁶⁸ Acts 16:25-36

⁶⁹ 1 Samuel 2:26

we do, but what about events? Are our own experiences or events allowed to be like His?

These are odd questions, but following the analogy of the events of Easter, and God losing His only son, against our experience now losing our only son, it intrigued me enough to look forward in my quiet time book (I didn't have a calendar handy) to work out when Day 50 would be. Jesus died at Passover and after 50 days the Holy Spirit came in power on the day of Pentecost. I knew that August had 31 days so I counted manually the days of September. I smiled as I turned the last page to Day 50 and saw September 19th. This was the day Mike was due to start Nexus Music School⁷⁰ Coventry.

The manna was only for the children of Israel and even some of them complained about it. The reading in my Quiet Time book for September 19th is Romans 1 where Paul said: "...I'm not ashamed of the gospel..."⁷¹ This was true of Mike's Face Book and Bebo websites where he called himself "Guitarist for Christ"⁷². We had the words, "I'm not ashamed..." put onto Mike's funeral sheet, and at his 'Celebration of Praise' we played the song "I'm not Ashamed" by Hillsong⁷³.

Now here I found another 'bread crumb' that God had given particularly to me. He knew I'd be interested in 'the trivia' that points toward His perfect timing and His commanding control over every detail of Mike's life and death and resurrection into eternal life.

15. I AM FREE

Back in June, very close friends of ours (that we've known and loved for more than 20 years who have gone through the deepest places in our life and marriage over those years) arranged for a 1-week holiday in a self-catering apartment at the beach, set for late August. Two things were strange about this. Firstly, they rarely if ever, had taken a 7-day holiday in at least 16 years and certainly not to a self-catering apartment. They normally take long week-ends due to their busy work load. Secondly, the apartment had 8 beds but there were only 3 of them.

They began to invite friends to join them but each one had to back out due to changes in their schedules. By the last days in July, they had decided that perhaps God was saying they should go alone and enjoy time as a family. No sooner had they settled on this, Mike passed away and they immediately felt *we* should join them. And so it was, that on Mark's birthday, he and I found ourselves walking down a beach 'board walk' in a foreign country, still stunned by the event that brought us there.

...

When Mike was 14, he put together a slide show presentation this music on the computer and chose the song: "*I Am Free*" by The Newsboys⁷⁴. It was so good, we wondered if he'd like to work in video editing someday, perhaps with our own organization's news and information service. I encouraged him to think about a media course at the college down the street after finishing his GCSEs. When it came to the line: "*I am free to dance*", Mike had videoed himself behind closed doors using the webcam on the computer in his sister's room. It was so 'uncharacteristic' of Mike to dance for the Lord! He is so quiet and so reserved. Even to the day he died we never heard him sing at all, and he would certainly not dance!

One time I asked him what he'd like from his time at Nexus music school where he had been accepted for a guitar course. He said he wanted to learn how to sing. At first I wondered if that was a typical teenage response that actually meant: "*Hello! I'm signed up for a guitar course!*" But his face didn't show that this 'smart remark' crossed his mind, so I took him seriously. This was amazing! If this was his extrovert younger sister, I would understand it. But coming from Mike, it was a real surprise.

When we went to his 'open day' at Nexus, I asked if it was possible to learn to sing if you're signed up for another music stream. They said they'd work around it if possible, and I commented on this response to Mike as we drove home. It did make sense that Mike would *want* to worship with his voice and with words while playing the guitar. It seemed now that he would have liked someone to help him 'break out' of the shell he was clearly in. He certainly would only dance behind a closed door and, at 14, this homemade music video was so well timed and

⁷⁰ <http://www.nexustrust.co.uk/>

⁷¹ Romans 1:16

⁷² <http://www.bebo.com/Profile.jsp?MemberId=4759008102>

⁷³ <http://us.hillsongmusic.com/the-greatness-of-our-god-bt-with-no-bv-hillsong-live/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.newsboysstore.com/store/music/product/houston-we-are-go/>

brilliant with 'his little jig' caught on film, that we laughed out loud to and immediately wanted a copy. We didn't get a copy. He lost the links and didn't redo it. In fact, he never put together another slide show like it.

In the aftermath of his 'departure', the police had taken Mike's computer, video camera and mobile phone. In a phone call later, we were told that these would be kept until after the coroner's inquest. So we didn't know what he had saved to either of these for another couple of months.

Strangely enough, we have never heard that song sung in a church service and only knew it from Mike's video presentation put together 4 years before. So it was with deep surprise that morning as we walked along the 'board walk' just three short weeks after Mikey died, only to come across it being sung by a girl with an amp in a make-shift church service so far from home. We couldn't have timed it if we'd tried!

Mark couldn't find the coffee papers which later turned out to be under his nose. That 'hiccup' delayed our walk and departure from the beach apartment. In the 7 days we were there, there was only one Sunday morning when church services were held at that beach hall. The duration of most songs is about 5 minutes. The 'window of opportunity' was incredibly tight. Had we walked in the opposite direction we wouldn't have heard it. Had we hit that section of the board walk 5 minutes earlier, we would have been far enough passed the music hall to no longer be able to hear it. Had we left 5 minutes later, we would not have been outside the hall when they began to play it, and would never have heard it! This was Mike's song. The first he'd put together using computer media and the only one we saw him dance to.

...

Straight after Mike's 'Celebration of Praise', the girls went to MTO (a Christian camp in Holland). Mike and his sisters were all booked in to go on this annual adventure together. As it turned out, the first day of camp was the day of the funeral. We had thought of cancelling it for the girls. Having thought of the options though, (and with their own unique needs, processing this event as young people would) we felt it best for them to go on as planned to the camp without their brother, to be among their close friends and youth leaders at this incredibly difficult time.

While there, Mike's older sister had many multi-layered questions in her search for understanding the loss of her only brother. To one small group of friends she asked, "When it comes to forgiveness and we are to forgive anyone who hurts us, has anyone thought of forgiving God?" Her friends were clearly undecided and couldn't think that a perfect God would do anything wrong to begin with, therefore He can't be in a position of needing our forgiveness. She left it at that, but it was playing on her mind as she grappled with the hurt of loss inside.

On the night before we flew out for this beach town break, she told us what happened around the fire at MTO.

In tears over hurt, along with the concept of forgiving (or not forgiving) God, she decided to cross the fireside circle and speak with the camp leaders. As she approached one leader, and before she could speak her mind, he said, "I'm glad you came over here. I've wanted to come over to you for a long time because I think God has three things to say to you. Firstly, Mike knew you all loved him (a topic she'd grappled with from the first day and mentioned it in her 'farewell speech' at Mike's funeral). Secondly, I think God wants to say He's sorry for the pain He has caused you (the second issue she had by this stage struggled with, but had so far received no answers for). And lastly, Mike's dancing. In fact he's so caught up in dancing he doesn't realize he's gone."

Again with tears, as we walked through the mist brought to shore by Hurricane Bill in that small beach town, Mark and I were blown away that in this foreign land (and on the very first day) the first thing we hear is this song we'd spoken of so much over the last couple of weeks, thinking we'd probably never find a copy of again, at least not in the way Mike had put it together.

Through his tears on that birthday morning, Mark realized he never got any presents or even a card from us for his birthday, but God was saying, 'Happy Birthday Mark. This is a present from Mike.' God sent the best present Mark could have asked for: the message that Mike was free. He is freed for the shell that held him in. Now free to be all God wanted him to be. ...Free to run ... free to dance.

This 'bread crumb' from the hand of God nourished us once again and restored our hope in His controlling power, authority and timing. Even in a different country – the bread crumbs kept falling from the sky. To say that stumbling across this song in a foreign beach town was a well-timed co-incidence would be to reject God's generous and loving kindness. His love is better than life⁷⁵ and because of this, our lips *will* praise Him.

⁷⁵ Psalm 63:3

16. KUTLESS

It was only the second morning on our break away, when we peddled in a peddle car with our friends heading down the board walk to find breakfast. We came to the exact same spot (where we heard the song 'I am Free') and found yet another surprise in store for us. The Christian Music group *Kutless*, were set to play there that night.

...

When Mike at 16 fell from the top of the climbing wall at our main leisure center and caused a serious compression fracture to his back, he was convinced he'd be in a wheelchair for the rest of his life. Thankfully he was discharged from the hospital the next day. But the injury caused him to be off school for three months and recommended to not climb for 6 months! During that time he picked up Mark's old guitar and got onto the internet looking for the latest Christian music. We had no part in the forming of Mike's music 'likes and dislikes'. He knew all the groups out there and gravitated to some more than others. The first Kutless CD he bought was at Teen Street⁷⁶ in Germany later that same year. And the first Kutless song he liked and showed to me (no doubt because of the brilliant guitar pieces in it that I also enjoyed very much), was "*Take Me In*"⁷⁷ from their "Strong Tower" Album.

Amazingly, this was one of my favorite songs from my ship days and since I'd not heard of Kutless before Mike introduced me to their music, I wasn't even sure the song originated from them. The way it was played though was totally brilliant.

Then by the end of 2007, Mike heard that Kutless were holding a competition for young guitarists. The winner would get the privilege of playing with them. Mike was excited. To this day though, I don't think he applied. It was simply a thought and dream that propelled him into the vision of his future - that saw himself involved in large scale worship. A dream that never left him but kept him focused to save madly for his Nexus course due to start September 19th 2009.

With parents from two countries, one day I asked Mike where he felt he belonged: in England or Australia. His reply was that he would have more 'opportunities' in America or Australia. America had not entered into any of our previous family discussions, and Mike wasn't an opportunist. He wasn't a career orientated person. To answer that way, I knew he only meant 'opportunities to be involved in large scale worship' in the big churches he'd seen on the internet in those two countries.

...

As Mark paid for the Kutless tickets at the box office that morning at the beach, He couldn't believe we were actually about to see Mike's favourite group, a group that Mike himself had never seen in concert. Mark mentioned our story to the lady at the box office: why we were there in the first place, and how amazing it was to be seeing Kutless just over 3 weeks after our son died. She was in tears.

Later that day our friend asked me what I thought of getting there early to see if we could meet them. Mark was thinking the same thing as we got ready for supper. As the evening moved on though, we arrived only in time to be seated. Our friend went back stage and re-emerged with the message that they already knew about us and wanted to see us! They had receive a note and wanted to meet us. It turned out to be the box office lady who told them! Before the event, we got some lovely photos with the group and during the evening they played my favourite song – the song Mikey played for me on his MP3 player so long before - '*Take me In*'. After the show the girls bought the last poster which they signed; the last T'Shirt in their size; and got a couple more really cool photos with the group.

Mike wouldn't have been jealous at all. He'd smile if God was to tell him. He'd be glad we got this blessing, knowing it was *his* group we were seeing.

Kutless had just come off an international tour which included places like Australia and Canada, and played to audiences of thousands. This on the other hand, was a small family beach town and the first time the local college managed to get a Christian group to play at that 1000 seat music hall. They only sold 400 tickets that night.

⁷⁶ <http://www.teenstreet.de/>

⁷⁷ <http://www.kutless.com/albums/StrongTower.aspx>

It must have been the quietest concert Kutless had ever had! And it came in one single 24-hour window of opportunity when we were there. Had we not gone to breakfast in that direction that morning, we would never have seen the sign up. Only one performance a day and the signs are renewed each night. By the next morning, Mark noticed that there was already another sign up for the next performance of someone else. It was a one-off show and a considerable impossibility to plan, even if we'd tried.

As I stood with my hands held high and looked down the row at Mark and the girls clapping and 'dancing' to Mike's songs sung by a band he'd followed for 3 years and never got to see himself, a group who inspired him to worship and aspire to be a worship leader, I thanked God for being God. No-one on earth could have arranged this moment. It was as if all of eternity stood still for us to enjoy this moment in time, that could only have been completely from God – none other than a God-story, as He sent us 'bread crumbs in the storm'.

17. FINDING MEANING AMONG THE ROCKS

The girls had left me with all the belongings and Mark had headed down-beach in the opposite direction. I was alone and beginning to sit uncomfortably on those hard rocks. Just as I started wishing someone would come back, I looked up to see a sign that read, "*Keep off the jetty*". I smiled at the Americans calling this surf breaker and pile of rocks, a 'jetty'. Aren't jetties flat so that you can go out walking on them, perhaps doing some fishing off it or tie a boat to it? I didn't move. Instead, my attention was caught by two little sparrows that had popped up from among the rocks.

"Aw, that's cute" I mused, "there's me and Mark... how sweet."

Before long, two more sparrows appeared and sat on the next rock. "That's nice. There are the girls. Now it's just the four of us. It's a shame Mike's missing now." But just as I said that, out from the rocks came another little sparrow and it sat itself on yet another rock all be itself.

"Ok God, thank-you. I do still have Mike. He's just not with us. He's sitting on another rock that's all."

Quite unexpectedly, a 6th little sparrow appeared! "O my word, Lord. This *can't* be prophetic!" Maybe it's not such a good idea after all, to find meaning among the rocks!!

... The six little sparrows flew off together and the next wave rolled in.

18. OVERLOOKING CENTER COURT

At the end of the week away, Mike's sister was to return to the ship from Newark airport and, with Hurricane Danny approaching behind torrential rain, we decided to go early to New York. This put us in Time Square on the morning of the 4th Sunday after Mike left us.

Mike's younger sister, Mark and our close friend had to stand at the back. But amazingly, I was seated in the centre of the tiers directly above the stage in the amazing old, converted theatre of Time Square Church in Manhattan. I had only been in a Playhouse theatre once before when I took Mark to see *River Dance* in Edinburgh for his 40th birthday. At the time, I remembered marveling at how steep the tiers were! Everyone had full view of the stage, no matter how high up you were! As the wonderful choir began to sing, tears welled up in my eyes.

In the earliest days of this storm, I had been saying that Mike's dream of being part of large scale worship, (what he was seeing on the internet of large churches like Hillsong Australia), was only the 'center court' – like Center Court at Wimbledon Stadium. Actually, if the camera panned out far enough to take in all of what the angels could see, the stage would be surrounded by tiers upon tiers that would go up, stretching out into eternity⁷⁸. Now I was sitting in the first of the tiers with full view of the stage laid out before me (almost as if I would reach out and touch it), and I imagined the eternal cloud of witnesses also enjoying this remarkable chorale.

As the tears flowed, I realized we never took Mike to see this sort of thing. He'd never been in a church like this.

⁷⁸ Hebrews 12:1

He only dreamed about it, and quietly wished he'd one day get the privilege of playing his guitar on a stage like the one below me now. I whispered an apology to God for not taking Mike to see such diverse worship teams in his lifetime. Yet I thanked God that what we see now is only a shadow or reflection of the things to come⁷⁹. At that moment, Mike was witnessing something even more astounding⁸⁰ than this wonderful vision laid out before us in that beautiful theatre.

Closing my eyes and listening to the sweet voices, this became yet another amazing 'bread crumb' of sweet, rich manna to enjoy and to sooth my soul, as the winds of change began to roll back the clouds.

19. TIME SQUARE

The danger when a storm brings an end to your world as you once knew it, is that you could run the risk of thinking it may well be an end to *the* world.

When the plane tipped horribly to one side then, instead of correcting it tipped wildly to the other, I thought 'this was it!' We were over Paris and I immediately remembered a documentary I once watched on aircraft computers that had gone wrong. One home video filmed an Israeli cargo plane flip completely onto its back above the suburbs of Paris. Thankfully the pilot corrected that malfunction and the plane landed safely.

What was weird for us was that the 'bumpy landing' happened again on that same trip when coming into Philadelphia. The turbulence caused by Hurricane Bill off the coast of America in the summer of 2009, was something we'd not experienced before in our 3 decades of travel experience. To 'top it', we were on an Air France flight – not the most brilliant companies to fly after their crash off the coast of Brazil six weeks earlier. We were all together, the last four in the family now that Mike had 'gone on ahead' of us. Maybe this was what the whole awful event was about after all: it's our time to go now. Mike was like 'the first fruits'⁸¹ of the harvest.

The plane didn't crash but you wouldn't have blamed one for having such thoughts, if your quiet time readings since Mike left covered all the 'last days books' of the Old Testament! If I had thought that God's timing was perfect to this point, it didn't settle at all nicely with the section of scriptures covered for the remaining days of August! Surely God would know I should be reading happy passages of sunshine and butterflies, instead of the final act in a universal play!

Every day for the last 21 days since Mike's departure, my Quiet Time book spoke of impending judgment and the final ushering in of a Saviour King. These prophetic books spoke of a physical judgment that actually happened in human history to the Children of Israel, but they also pointed to a future hope 'after the storm' and this day (Day 21 – August 21st) was no different...

Joel 2 (my reading for that day as I sat pitching in a plane 33,000 feet above the sea) was a bible passage quoted often in evangelical churches from the mid-nineties (primarily focused on v28-29). Many looked to a hope of a real move of the Holy Spirit in our time where these words would ring true of our own Christian experience. It wasn't until this flight, as I read these words for August 21st, that I realized they were only a tiny fraction of the whole chapter. The rest of the chapter, and its apocalyptic vision of things to come, wasn't very good for someone whose faith was formed at a time when Armageddon wasn't written off as science fiction (or an event that won't happen for at least a couple more centuries). Nor was it particularly brilliant for someone who had just lost their only son, and was at that moment traveling on a plane that was about to release its oxygen masks!

Now, as the plane jolted furiously, coupled with the 'play back' of my own words (of Mike being part of the 'heavenly host' in Jesus entourage when He returns), the 'end of *our* world' as we once knew it, started to look like the beginning of the 'end of *the* world'!

....

The speaker stepped to the podium in that beautiful old theatre on the 4th Sunday after Mike left us. After introducing his message: "*Leaving the Wilderness with Power*", his first words were: "*Let us be absolutely clear, it is no longer a matter of years but months...*"

⁷⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:11&12

⁸⁰ Revelations 7:9-12 (Further Reading: Isaiah 6:1-3; Daniel 7:9-10)

⁸¹ Revelation 14:4-5

He went on to explain in tones that echoed the ancient prophet Jeremiah, that (at a time when people were pouring out words of prosperity and future hope of financial recovery), he predicted a considerable downturn in the events ahead. While many outside the church would be ‘wringing their hands’ and not knowing where to turn, *his* church was to be absolutely prepared and ready. For the sake of the lost (whom Jesus had compassion for because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd⁸²) the congregation there should be ready to ‘lead through the process’ and, just like Jesus⁸³, leave the ‘wilderness’ in power.

I sat amazed. I really couldn’t believe what I was hearing. My mind wandered onto a phone call just days after Mikey left, where a close friend (who was herself dying of brain tumors at the time) said that I was ‘leading her through the process’. In that darkened theatre as the speaker’s strong voice pierced the silence, I realized that she was right. Unbeknown to me, I was taking the lead as I should in matters of life and death and faith as a believer and follower of the Lord of life who holds the keys of death⁸⁴. Who do those without faith turn to, except to us who are guardians of the good news, the ‘gospel’, the words of eternal life? As Peter rightly pointed out to Jesus, *‘you alone have words of eternal life’*⁸⁵. There was nowhere to turn back then and no-one’s come up with the same idea since – hope in Eternal Life as the Bible describes it, is only found in Jesus teachings.

Our world, as we once knew it, has ended for us. I’m not saying that this is a precursor to the end of *the* world (that would be incredibly egocentric when there are 6 billion other deaths that are just as significant across the globe). I am saying that a tornado hit our home and carried us into the upper stratosphere before dropping us into a foreign country to receive some pretty amazing ‘bread crumbs’ from the Hand of God.

...

Before returning back to the UK, Mark bought me a painting of a beach scene after a storm. It was very apt for our situation having had our own private tsunami hit our lives, and because we’d just finished a week at a beach town where we watched firsthand how Hurricane Bill had wreaked havoc in the first half of the week while Hurricane Danny finished the job off the following week-end.

My painting now hangs opposite me on my lounge room wall as I sit typing this story to you. I got a small brass commemorative inscription engraved for it and call it: *“After the Storm”*. It wasn’t until we unpacked it at home and stood back taking in its full meaning for us, that I noticed one more thing... Taking central place just below the early morning sun, 5 sea gulls had just taken flight: 2 together and 3 slightly separate. In our hearts, we will still always be that family of five. It’s just that now, one has flown away⁸⁶.

The waves are still crashing against the rocks in our painting, and dark clouds still litter the sky. But the sun now shines and its light pierces through the closest wave. As the eye of the storm passes further away, there are still no solid answers. But one thing is sure, in my hour of unspeakable distress *“I have now seen the One who sees me”*⁸⁷.

20. MIKE’S LAST DAY ON EARTH

Quiet Time Book July 31st – Mike’s last day with us.

Psalm 145

A psalm of praise. Of David.

¹ I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever.

² Every day I will praise you ...

³ Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; **his greatness no one can fathom.**

⁴ **One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts**

⁶ They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and **I will proclaim your great deeds....**

¹⁴ **The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down....**

¹⁸ **The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.**

¹⁹ He fulfils the desires of those who fear him; **he hears their cry and saves them.**

²⁰ **The LORD watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy.**

²¹ **My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.**

⁸² Matthew 9:36 & Mark 6:34 (Further Reference to: Numbers 27:17; 1Kings 22:17; 2 Chronicles 18:16 & Isaiah 13:14)

⁸³ Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:9-12; Luke 4:1-13

⁸⁴ Revelations 1:17-19

⁸⁵ John 6:60-68

⁸⁶ Psalm 90:10

⁸⁷ Genesis 16:13

Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

Even if we've imagined everything; even if Mike's death was pure and simple a physical event – the machine stopped, that's it and that's all. This one event that changed the fabric of our family forever, and all the so-called 'co-incidents' surrounding it, has caused us to be convinced without any doubt that...

*God hears our cry,
and that
He watches over all who love Him,
therefore
our mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
- Let every creature praise His holy name for ever and ever⁸⁸. –*

21. THE LIFTING OF THE CLOUD

Six weeks after Mike left us, I went to bed with a tiny sensation of God's Spirit within me welling up to excitement. After getting to what I felt was surely 'the brink of insanity' in the dark hours of the previous night (having a real sense of fear that the next step would lead me to a nervous breakdown and I'd wake up in a home for the mentally disturbed) I had resolved to grasp with both hands the life that God has given me; my two amazingly captivating daughters, and my lovely husband. My lovely house (that I had only just finished decorated on the night of July 31st) was now waiting for me to enjoy as I surveyed my handy work, and I had resolved to join the gym the next day.

Sept 8th was to mark the 'lifting of the pillar of cloud' in the wilderness⁸⁹. The time of mourning was over⁹⁰ and it was time to 'break camp and move on into the Promised Land'. Upon opening my quiet time book (and not surprised at all), I found that it was covering Acts 16. A full circle had come round from the day I sat quoting Paul's jail house story back to God, before dawn on the third day, while praying for a 'jail break' for Mike.

"Sometimes in the crisis of life, we think more clearly than at any other time. The superfluous evaporates. The essentials rise up. Things swing into perspective. Often, it is only in the face of danger or loss that we perceive what is important and what is unimportant in life. In WWII, many soldiers "got religion" while in their fox holes under enemy fire. Because many of these 'fox hole conversions' were not genuine, people had become skeptical of anyone who becomes a Christian under stress. Yet there are many, including the Philippian jailer in Acts 16, who will testify that some 'fox hole conversions' were genuine. Be sensitive to the Lord when you are under stress. It may be the Lord trying to help you get your life into perspective."⁹¹

22. PUBLIC HEARING: CORONER'S INQUEST

October 10th Quiet Time

(The day we divided up Mike's belongings⁹² and cleared his room.)

*"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,
who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble
with the comfort we ourselves have received from God..."⁹³*

My stomach turned over when I stepped through the lounge room door and saw Mike's face. Mark had put together a number of photos in an album for a friend, which meant that many could be put onto an electronic photo displayer he bought in the days after Mike died. The photo displayer shows photos in a continual cycle until it is turned off, and this one photo was exactly how we found Mike on the day he died. We had been on a car journey to Mike's Interview down at Nexus Coventry and Mike had fallen asleep on the way home. His mouth was slightly opened, eyes shut. He was completely 'out solid' in the passenger seat when Mark took the photo.

⁸⁸ Psalm 145

⁸⁹ Exodus 40:36

⁹⁰ Deuteronomy 34:8

⁹¹ "Quiet Times" Max E. Anders © Wolgemuth & Hyatt Publishers Inc. Brentwood Tennessee. - September 8th

⁹² John 19:23&24

⁹³ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5

I sat looking at that same face on August 1st, and knew every detail of it. Even the tips of his teeth showing from his slightly open mouth were imprinted on my memory just like that photo, now suspended in time. August 1st would be the last time I saw Mike asleep in this way except, on that day, he wasn't asleep. When I saw this photo on the displayer, I seriously wondered if it was such a good idea to show it at all, especially at a time like this!

We didn't remove the photo, and the weeks rolled on.

...

The phone rang and I heard Mark say, "Yes, I've been waiting for your call." Before I could start to guess who it was, he said he'd put it on speaker phone so that I could also hear what was being said. Now two months after the event, this was the call we'd hoped would bring closure for us.

It was October 7th and Mark and I were having a coffee in the conservatory and talking about our daughter's recollection of her last night with Mike. It took her two months to tell us that she remembered being the last person awake with Mike in the kitchen getting a snack before going to her room. Just as she was leaving the kitchen, she had a strong feeling that she should tell Mike she loved him. This made her feel silly so she just told him not to forget to turn off all the lights. She went up stairs and climbed into a makeshift bed she'd made on the floor where she immediately broke down in tears. She couldn't understand why she was crying, and could only 'nail it' to an overwhelming sense of loneliness. She couldn't remember what happened next and assumed she'd cried herself to sleep. Mark and I were sitting discussing this new revelation that had only come to light the day before, (as well as milling over Mark's feeling of sadness that day) when the coroner phoned.

With both of us pressed to the hand set, the coroner told us that the tissue samples had arrived back from the lab down south. There was nothing found that was unusual and that could point toward a cause of death. With this, and the original autopsy that found nothing wrong with Mike i.e. he was healthy; all his major organs were healthy; there was no apparent heart condition after the cardio vascular system was checked; and no reason to claim a fatal epileptic seizure as the cause; there still remained no provable reason why Mike died.

In the early weeks, helpful friends and family had sent us newspaper articles and links to Adult Sudden Death Syndrome websites, so we asked about this. The coroner's response was that a noted cause of death such as Adult SDS, would leave 'clues' that point to this conclusion. A pathologist's report is as much about what is found as it is about what is *not* found. In the absence of pointers that suggest or prove ASDS, it would be inappropriate and even wrong to put this as a cause of death simply by default. Therefore, in Mike's case, it is better to conclude an "unascertained natural death", then to say a known medical cause without proof.

To explain this he said that humans are as much an electrical machine as they are a motorized one. The electrics can be tested when someone is alive, not after they are dead i.e. they've lost electrical current that enables the 'machine of the human' to continue to work. 'Why' and 'how' are impossible to prove after the electrics cease.

When the phone call with the coroner ended, Mark and I puzzled on. Another name for electricity is 'power'. When the lights go out we'll often say, "Power cut!!" We also often speak of the Holy Spirit's *power* e.g. we operate or minister in the *power* of the Holy Spirit. When people experience the power of the Holy Spirit, they often describe it as electricity running through their body. The Quakers were originally known because they quaked (shook) under the 'power of the Holy Spirit' and came to be called *Quakers*. Many were persecuted at the time because of this sign or manifestation of God's *power* on them.

In the absence of anything wrong with the machine (the pump and system, the 'mechanics of Mike'), the only other thing is the electrics and who has created the electrics in the first place? Every car has an ignition and starter motor that 'kick starts' the engine – but how does a half-formed human heart start to beat spontaneously in something as tiny as a 22-day old human embryo? The central nervous system can modify the frequency of heart beats, but it doesn't initiate it!⁹⁴ Electrical charges around the human body in the first place are a minute-by-minute miracle. These point only to the power of the Creator to not just make the human body work and 'come to life' in the first place, but to *sustain* it miraculously every day. "*In Him we live and move and have our being*"⁹⁵. Mike's sustaining *power* stopped. Or, in the case of God's power over humans, God's sustaining power was *withdrawn*. "*The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away.*"⁹⁶

⁹⁴ <http://www.sciforums.com/showthread.php?t=51013>

⁹⁵ Acts 19:28

⁹⁶ Job 1:21

Coming back from making another coffee on the morning of that coroner's phone call, Mark opened his bible on the next Psalm due to be read and found these words... *"I've thrown myself headlong into your arms— I'm celebrating your rescue. I'm singing at the top of my lungs, I'm so full of answered prayers."*⁹⁷

Just two days before this, Mike's oldest sister sat talking to me on the sofa about heaven and said, "We don't know what we don't know". When we live on planet earth and enjoy God's Blessings here, we don't realize that we need to be 'rescued' at all. A person with a happy middle class existence doesn't think that he needs to be 'saved'. The concept of being 'saved (or rescued) from sin' in the mind of the unbeliever is at times just as remotely placed as being 'rescued from this dark world' is to the Christian! When we pass away, (even from our middle class lucky existence) we are being rescued from work⁹⁸; rescued from the weight of deadlines, the schedules, the responsibilities; rescued from the curse of sin⁹⁹, from our own basic sinfulness and from tears¹⁰⁰; rescued from aging, sickness and decease; rescued from the day-in-day-out negative comments about what you're doing or what you're not doing¹⁰¹. We are rescued into a place that is far better than here¹⁰². Mike was rescued and because of this, we *will 'sing at the top of our lungs' that we are 'full of answered prayers'*.

While Mark opened the post, I went to the office to work on a photo frame my family had kindly offered to pay for, to display our family with Mike in a lovely collage of the way we once were. The first envelope held a card from very close friends of Mark's parents. This in itself was amazing. It was now 2 months since Mike died! But the card reiterated down to the very words everything we had just been talking about! Two months after the event and on this day of all days straight after speaking to the coroner, the words of this dear friend not just confirmed again God's calling on Mike's life but also quoted our own words when it happened: *"In His Majesty's Royal Service"*. (I had only just been wondering whether I should emboss these words into our family photo frame!)

As Mark stood amazed at the timing of the words in this card, a song came on our lounge room CD player...

*Only by Grace can we enter,
Only by Grace can we stand
Not by our human endeavor,
But by the blood of the Lamb
Into Your presence You draw us, You call us to come,
Into Your presence You call us, And now by Your Grace we come*¹⁰³.

Just as Mark looked up from the card to focus on the song, (with uncanny, precision timing that was little short of miraculous) Mike's face appeared on the electronic photo displayer! That same face we saw on August 1st etched forever in our minds (and wondered on and off in the past weeks about removing it from photo sequence), that face fast asleep in the car *on a journey with his father*, now timed to perfection, to come up on the electronic photo display screen.

With tears now flowing, Mark was in no doubt at all that God had clearly just spoken. In three instantaneous messages, God clearly spoke to the head of the home and Mike's Dad, that what the coroner was saying (and had said in the beginning) was in fact true: there was no *earthly* reason why our son died. Then in the words on the card coupled with the words of the song, Mike was *called into God's presence and by His Grace Mike came*.

Because of these things, all earthly reason is laid to rest when it finds its place in heaven.

...

Not knowing if we were carrying a genetic defect that caused this sudden death (and therefore would mean that the girls may also be in danger) our GP got all of us swift referrals to a Heart specialist on the east coast. The specialist had been recommended to me by the charity CRY (Cardiac Risk in the Young) and we attended the following week. All of us were checked with various heart tests. They had an echocardiogram done on Mike when he was younger still on file, and was able to re-check this in light of his death.

There was nothing wrong with us there was nothing wrong with Mike.

⁹⁷ Psalm 13:5&6 – Eugene Peterson: 'The Message' paraphrase

⁹⁸ Genesis 3:17

⁹⁹ Revelation 22:3

¹⁰⁰ Revelation 7:17

¹⁰¹ Matthew 13:41

¹⁰² Revelation 21:9-27

¹⁰³ Words and Music by: [Gerrit Gustafson](#) Performed by: Graham Kendrick 1990 Integrity's Hosanna! Music

	Topic			Bible Reference	Comment	Chapter	Foot note
	Eternal Life	OT	19	Psalm 24:3-6	Those with clean hands stand in 'the Holy Place'	12	64
	Eternal Life	OT	19	Psalm 90:10	We don't die, we fly away	19	86
	Eternal Life	NT	01	Matthew 9:24	Not dead... but asleep!	5	38
	Eternal Life	NT	01	Matthew 13:41	Heaven: Nothing that can Cause sin will get in	22	101
	Eternal Life	NT	04	John 6:60-68	Jesus Unique Teaching on Eternal Life	19	85
	Eternal Life	NT	19	Hebrews 12:1	Surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses	18	78
	God's Holy Spirit	NT	26	Jude 1:24	He will Present us to God without Fault	11	57
				Genesis 12:3; Genesis 18:18; Genesis 28:14 (also Acts 3:25)	Abraham's Blessing is for Us All	1	22
	God's Plan to Save the World	OT	01	Genesis 9:26-27	Japheth can live in the tents of Shem	1	25
	God's Plan to Save the World	OT	19	Psalm 13:5&6	He will rescue us	22	97
						Authors	
	God's Plan to Save the World	OT	24	Jeremiah 29:13	God can be found	Notes	6
	God's Plan to Save the World	NT	04	John 3:5	Repentance & Baptised are key	12	59
	God's Plan to Save the World	NT	06	Romans 1:20	God is clearly seen through His Creation	1	26
						Authors	
	God's Plan to Save the World	NT	07	1 Corinthians 2:4	God Demonstrates his Power today	Notes	5
	God's Plan to Save the World	NT	27	Revelation 22:3	No more curse	22	99
	How does God think	NT	01	Matthew 18:22	He believes in Forgiveness	13	65
	Our Relationship to God	OT	01	Genesis 2:7	He gave us Life	8	43
	Our Relationship to God	OT	18	Job 1:21	The Lord Give and Takes Away	22	96
	Our Relationship to God	OT	19	Psalm 24:1	The Earth is the Lord's and everything in it	12	64
	Our Relationship to God	OT	19	Psalm 145	He watches over, holds & hears us	20	88
	Our Relationship to God	OT	20	Proverbs 1:10-19	He is our Father. We're under His instruction	12	61
	Our Relationship to God	OT	23	Isaiah 45:3	Makes Himself Known in the turmoil of life	5	37
				Matthew 9:36; Mark 6:34 (Further reference to: Numbers 27:15-17; Isaiah 13:14)	He has compassion on those who are 'Harrassed'	19	82
	Our Relationship to God	NT	01	John 17:15	Jesus Prays on Our Behalf for Protection	8	46
	Our Relationship to God	NT	04	John 1:12-13	We are children 'born of God'	12	62
	Our Relationship to God	NT	05	Acts 19:28	In Him we live and move and have our being	22	95
	Our Relationship to God	NT	08	2 Corinthians 1:3-5	God comforts us so we can comfort others	22	93
				Psalm 9:8, 58:11, 75:7 & 110:6; Isaiah 28:6; John 5:22; Acts 10:42; Romans 2:16; 1 Corinthians 4:4; 2 Timothy 4:1; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 1:17, 2:23 & 4:5; Revelation 18:8 & 19:11	Our Father is our Judge	11	53
	Prayer	NT	01	Matthew 6:11	How do we pray	P1 Title Page	8
	The Bible	NT	01	Matthew 4:4	We need it to survive	8	49
	Things to Come	OT	27	Daniel 7:10	Worship around God's Throne	1	18
	Things to Come	NT	01	Matthew 25:6; John 14:1-3	The Bridegroom will come	1	19
	Things to Come	NT	07	1 Corinthians 15:51-52	We will be become imperishable	1	31
	Things to Come	NT	07	1 Corinthians 13:11-12	We see only a reflection of things to come	18	79
				Hebrews 9:27 (Further Ref: Ecclesiastes 11:9; Daniel 7:22; Zephaniah 1:2; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 10:15, 11:21-24 & 12:36; Romans 2:5; 2 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:7; 1 John 4:17; Jude 1:6	God has set a day for Judgement	11	52
	Things to Come	NT	21	Revelations 7:9	Clothed in Righteousness, dressed in white	8	44
				Revelations 7:9-12 (Further Reference to: Isaiah 6:1-3; Daniel 7:9-10)	Standing in the Throne Room of God	18	80
	Things to Come	NT	27	Revelation 7:17	No more tears	22	100
	Things to Come	NT	27	Revelation 21:9-27	A place where we will reside with Him	22	102
	Who is God's Son Jesus?	NT	01	Matthew 3:17	God's Only Son whom He loves	Intro	12
	Who is God's Son Jesus?	NT	12	Colossians 1:16-17	Creator and Sustains All Things	Intro	14
	Who is our God	OT	01	Genesis 14:18-20	The Most High God	Intro	13
	Who is our God	OT	01	Genesis 16:13	He is the God who sees us	19	87
				Leviticus 20:26 (See also 1Peter 2:9)	God's Chosen People & Royal Priesthood	1	27
	Who We Are	OT	03	Psalm 139:13 & 16	God made each of us	1	15
	Who We Are	OT	19				

