

PATH TO PEACE

Psalm 46: 1-2

God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives way and the mountains fall into the sea, though the waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.

FORGIVENESS

One basic principle adults must acknowledge on this journey called life is the absence of guarantees for solutions as the endless trials rear their ugly heads above the daily horizon. Thus, at some point on our earthly walk, most of us reach what we decipher as the limit of our human knowledge and wisdom for handling encounters. Then, reflecting backward with regrets and forward in puzzlement and fear, this vulnerable state of humanness suddenly stops us in our tracks for a time of reckoning. Thus, it is at this point that a decision must be made to either blame others for our plight or bend the knee in prayer asking for our Father's wisdom mercy and forgiveness.

Perhaps of these three gifts from God, the one that proves to be the most unsettling is that of forgiveness. Due to the monster called PRIDE that easily takes root in the heart, not only is it hard to forgive others, but also ourselves. After all, we reason inwardly, "Won't I appear weak in the eyes of society if I let another individual run over me without taking him down? Won't this behavior coming from me be a direct affront to my manhood? Certainly by claiming responsibility for my own actions in a time of turmoil, won't I show weakness and lose approval from those around me?"

Consequently, accepting this reasoning process that originated from society and not God, we willingly choose to spend years of our lives pointing toward the mistakes of others while wrapping our own body in a blanket made of bitterness and anger. Then, if by some miracle we do accept responsibility for our own errors, but are unable to believe God has forgiven us; guilt easily enters and locks itself tightly in our breast forever. Thus, over time, our feelings of unworthiness become such a comfortable old friend that healing of our broken hearts becomes an impossible feat.

Sadly, while experiencing pain from mistakes that threaten to engulf our very soul, we have ignored the relief and wisdom that are ever present within the pages of God's Word. An example of this can be found in Romans 4: 8 where it reads, "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." Additionally, in Matthew 18: 22, Jesus answers Peter's question regarding the number of times we are to forgive each other by stating, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times"; meaning we shouldn't even keep track of how many times we forgive someone.

ARRIVING HOME

As Dick Du Puis flew the many miles on his long flight back to the United States toward the sad chaos that he would now face, being fully human, many "if onlys" and "what ifs" probably crossed his mind along with the uncertainty of the best way to proceed when stepping foot on his country's soil. One thing he makes abundantly clear today about this tragic time is the overriding concern he held for the welfare of his children. The suffering and chaos they had already endured after his divorce was constantly on his mind. Even though past mistakes and regrets could not be changed, there had to be a path in this world that would lead to peace and security for them.

Unfortunately, sometimes when one thinks the worst is over, additional storm clouds blur clarity like gray dense fog in the darkest night. Just prior to his flight departure, he had been informed that a devastating earthquake had caused major damage throughout the Los Angeles area. This disaster had damaged the historic home he had just purchased, immeasurably. The plaster on the ceiling and walls were waiting to greet him like piles of waste in every room; destroying the safe harbor where his five children were to sleep that first night under his care.

Then, when frantically driving toward the nightmare that awaited his arrival, he was shocked and surprised when a careless driver rear ended him, bringing on even greater delay and turmoil. When Dick retold this horrible time in his life, as an outsider, it was absolutely impossible to try and wrap the mind around the complexity of it all. One can only try and imagine the level of anxiety and stress he was feeling at this moment in his life.

At this point in his world, it felt like a monster had reared its ugly head with the goal of devouring his sanity. His body was moving through the unfamiliar landscape as if on auto pilot. So much debris was flying directly into his path there was not time for self pity, deep thought or even fear. Instead, as he took each labored step, the ground beneath felt colder harder and more unfriendly to his feet.

Thus, when Dick revisited the heart wrenching events that unfolded upon his arrival home, his voice took on an edge to cover the tremors that occurred like aftershocks within his soul.

It was as if the earthquake that had so violently shaken the city had found a crack within which to enter his heart.

First, upon reaching the hospital, he had to legally give the order for the removal of life support from Jo Ann's paralyzed body that lacked any hope for recovery. Without the luxury of the time to grieve this process, he had to move quickly forward toward his five frightened little children. They, along with their belongings, would be packed and ready for transport to their new home where Dick would now assume the role of both father and mother. Not only were their little lives in chaos, but would also be spending the first night away from their mother's home in a place that had been shattered by tremors.

However, through sheer toughness and endurance, the piles of plaster had been removed from a couple of rooms that would now be their make-shift living quarters until better accommodations could be provided. Reflecting back on their adjustment that night, Dick was amazed at the courage his children displayed. The ease with which they adapted in the face of such tragedy, Dick attributed to the result of them living the past three years without the family unit intact, as well as being around a mother that was terminally ill. Fully realizing how traumatized his children must be at this moment, Dick's tired eyes never left their little bodies that night. He was fully aware of every breath they took.

Regardless of all the terrible commotion that had taken place in their lives, it was apparent to Dick that establishing order and a daily schedule were to be his immediate top priorities so that balance might be achieved. A whole new life now awaited a father and five precious little children.

Consequently, after Jo Ann's burial, since it was necessary for Dick to continue the process of earning a living, he began the search for a housekeeper/babysitter immediately. Unfortunately, this presented almost an impossible task because of the responsibility the care of five children required. Thus, after going through five employees, it was obvious the task of locating a nanny would be next to impossible. As each employee had entered and departed their lives, Dick had dwelt with theft of money and food as well as the inability to control the children.

After a hard day of work, one evening Dick arrived home to find the front door open with boards protruding out that served as a ramp the children had built for roller skating throughout the house. This activity had not only demonstrated the lack of discipline, but had also left the beautiful old wooden floors scarred beyond repair. At this point, Dick knew it was absolutely critical to get immediate control of his children without delay. They were wild beyond imagination. Given the sheer number of children, running a tight ship would be required.

Then, as a blessing from God, a relative from Gueydan, Louisiana whose maiden name had been Marie Trahan, a relative on Grandfather Trahan's side of the family, had traveled to California to visit a friend. When Dick received word of her arrival and had learned that she was now a widow, his heart skipped a beat. Could this be the answer to his prayer for a special nanny to watch over his children? She, after all, was a person he had grown up with in his small community; an individual he had visited during the hard times caused by The Great Depression that everyone experienced. He had fond memories of sitting in front of an old heater with Marie and enjoying the warmth of conversation together that seemed to lessen the impact from the trials all around. Sometimes they would have the luxury of toasting a piece of homemade bread on the heater as a special treat. At other times, added pleasure was experienced while enjoying a piece of Marie's sesame seed brittle; a recipe much like that used for making peanut brittle. Since she grew her own sesame seed plants, the seeds were a natural replacement for peanuts which made the sweet confection a special treasure.

Thus, rapidly recounting in Dick's mind, the pleasurable times he had spent with Marie, caused him to offer her the position of nanny without any hesitation what so ever. Then, when she happily and quickly accepted the offer that would propel her from a grieving widow into the world of laughter from five little children, Dick's heart was filled with unbelievable joy.

NANNY

The old saying—"They threw away the mold when they made Nanny," distinctly applies to the unique lady that would now serve Dick's household for many years to come. As a widow, moving to California from Gueydan would open up new horizons for this lady known to be so special.

Today, Dick and his children's reflections about Nanny bring a glow to their faces, love in their eyes and laughter to their lips every time they recall the mannerisms and actions that made her so unique. Certainly in every family member's mind, although she was always referred to as simply "Nanny", there was total agreement she was considered family.

When people, other than family, observed Nanny's behavior, they probably described her as being extremely gruff and to the point. However, Dick's entire family knew beyond doubt that she had truly a heart of gold. She would go about her day conducting her responsibilities in an efficient manner; letting the children know she meant business. In fact, she kept a diary of each child's day and reported to their father any wrong doing. It was clearly understood that the time needed for reaching home after school was 30 minutes; which became the golden rule. No flexibility! No time allowances! If a child was late, dad was called at his

office and the fur would fly. Thus, every evening Nanny gave a full accounting of each child's daily activities and achievements.

On the other hand, even today, when the children acknowledge Nanny's importance to them, they clearly will stress to one and all the role their father played in their lives at the same time. He was a hands-on father that not only served as dad, but accepted fully the responsibilities of a mother. He conducted all the serious conversations with both the boys and girls about their bodily changes and necessary life style habits. He taught the girls about posture, style and how to conduct themselves as ladies. The boys were encouraged to be gentlemen and treat ladies with respect. They had boundaries and expectations that were not only stressed, but were enforced from a platform of love by both Nanny and dad.

NANNY'S UNIQUENESS

Once upon arriving home for dinner, Dick found the children's plates loaded with an all white meal. Their plates were filled with white potatoes, white gravy, white pork, white turnips, and white bread. It was obvious as he observed mealtime, his children could not identify one food from another, prompting Dick to assist Nanny with the art of meal planning.

Therefore, each Saturday after Dick had planned the menu, alternating turns between the boys and girls, he would drive them to the farmer's market where all the food items were purchased in bulk. The children learned how to not only shop economically, but also received lessons in responsibility as they loaded items for transport home. In fact, Dick described the entire basement of their home as resembling a food warehouse where cans of food products were lined up and neatly stacked just like grocery store shelves. In the kitchen, bulk bins held items such as rice, flour and beans to accommodate the amount needed for serving a large family. Every day, the children would have responsibility for making the salads for the family; a process that was carried out under Nanny's watchful eyes.

Once, Dick recalls with laughter, arriving home to the delicious smell of what appeared to be one of Nanny's wonderful soup recipes. When asking Nanny what kind of soup they were having, she replied with her Cajun accent, "Split Pea Soup!" However, as Dick stirred the soup, he was mystified as to how it could be called split pea soup with its color being white instead of green. When asking Nanny for an explanation, she retorted, "Well, I did not have any split peas so I used white navy beans. Since I followed the recipe for split pea soup, it is split pea soup!" Dick had to walk away to hide his smile because Nanny was very serious about the situation. There were just certain traits one learned about Nanny's personality and this was one of them.

FALSE TEETH

For some unknown reason, Nanny and her false teeth had trouble getting along. Once when the entire family decided to spend a fun day together at the beach, a large wave rolled in and hit Nanny in the behind, causing her teeth to fly out of her mouth and be carried out to sea with the current. Dick immediately had to spend \$800 on a new pair of teeth for a disgruntled Nanny.

Another mishap with her teeth occurred when a gentleman escorted Nanny from a party at the main house to her living quarters in the guest area. Standing on the balcony looking down at the gentleman, she couldn't believe her ears when he asked her if she was one of Dick's beautiful daughters. Believing this to be an utterly ridiculous question and a come on at the same time, Nanny gave a loud sound of objection from her throat causing her teeth to be propelled out of her mouth into the air coming to rest below at the gentleman's feet. The next day, a frustrated Nanny holding the broken teeth in her hand, presented them in disgust to Dick.

NANNY'S PRONUNCIATION OF WORDS

Although Nanny was an extremely bright lady, her word pronunciation certainly presented puzzles and humor for the whole family. In fact, many times it would require a creative mind to decipher the word and its meaning.

Once when preparing the family for the attire they would wear to a wedding, Dick began the process of designing and sewing an outfit for everyone. Since Nanny was family, it was expected she would also join them in attending the fancy event. Thus, Dick approached Nanny asking her what color she would like her gown to be. Without hesitation, she loudly and confidently called out, "POTTED BLUE"! Since Dick was so familiar with her word pronunciations, he knew without asking, the color of her gown would be powder blue. However, she looked at him in a serious manner stating, "Don't be thinking you will choose my shoes. I will do that for myself."

Therefore, when the time came for the family to leave for the wedding festivities, Nanny proudly walked into the room wearing the elegant powder blue gown sporting a pair of ugly white shoes that contained perforated holes from one end to the other. These shoes were the ones she had chosen to her satisfaction because they allowed her feet to be cool and comfortable. Dick shrugged his shoulders and the family departed for the wedding with a happy Nanny in tow.

Another time, Nanny excitedly came running into a room informing Dick that a lady he made gowns for was on TV. When Dick asked Nanny who that person might be, she called out in a

voice of authority, "Gloria Leach"! Replying to Nanny that he did not know anyone named Gloria Leach caused her to experience great frustration, leaving the room in a huff. Then, a short time later, she loudly called for Dick to look at the TV so he could see his client Gloria Leach. Turning in curiosity to see who Gloria Leach could possibly be, he immediately recognized the familiar face of Cloris Leachman on the screen. When Dick said, "Nanny, that is Cloris Leachman", Nanny replied, "I told you she was your customer." Not once did she indicate the mistake of pronunciation. She simply left the room with a look of total satisfaction for being right.

Once, Nanny called Dick's office in total distress, sobbing so loudly that her voice could be heard easily by everyone around. She exclaimed, "Toad is in trouble! He is in the hospital! He is very sick!" (Toad was the nickname she called her brother Theodore.) Realizing Nanny had a tendency toward losing her composure during times of personal strife, Dick said, "Calm down, Nanny. Are you sure he is seriously ill?" Nanny shouted even louder into the receiver, "YES! HE IS IN 10 CENT CARE!" Once again, being familiar with her unique word pronunciation issues, Dick realized she meant intensive care and loaded Nanny on a flight bound for Louisiana.

NANNY THE TREASURE

Nanny had arrived at just the right time to a family in need of healing. Their hearts had been broken into pieces that would need to be tenderly put back together with hands that were strong gentle and full of love. Nanny, who had the unique personality a producer would have chosen for a TV series, had entered the jarred world of Dick Du Puis and his children at just the right time. Her values were clearly in place which caused her to be unaffected by glamour and a lifestyle that was so different from the one she had lived in Louisiana. She knew right from wrong and the children were expected to follow suit. Her mispronunciation of words, loud laughter, military style of following schedules and a heart filled with love offered just the right formula for the entire family. Nanny who was abundantly loved by Dick as well as the children, would live out the remainder of her years on earth adding much needed depth and stability to a wonderful family in need. At the same time, the blessings for her would be twofold. She would not only feel rewarded for her contribution, but also experience a daily wave of love from the family members that would totally saturate her soul and nourish every fiber of her being.

Proverbs 24: 3-4 best describes the calm that settled upon Dick's household with the words, "A house is built by wisdom and becomes strong through good sense. Through knowledge its rooms are filled with all sorts of precious riches and valuables."

Although tomorrow would hold its share of toil and pain, the air for Dick's family would now reverberate with the sounds of joyful songs and laughter. Without doubt, he strongly believed time would gently erase yesterday's sorrows, replacing them with shiny new dreams as they walked together down this new found PATH TO PEACE.



NANNY THE TREASURE



Nanny and the dogs.