

Chapter 9



“Mama Jo”

Isaiah 46: 4

**“Even to your old age and gray hairs
I am He, I am He who will sustain you.
I have made you and I will carry you;
I will sustain you and I will rescue you.”**

Faith In Eternity

No matter what divergent paths or different roadways one chooses to trod, only God knows what waits just around the bend. The fact that our Heavenly Father is aware of what awaits each of us and has an infinite plan for our journey, should provide a quiet, deep, unflinching faith to meet each trying hour.

Although “Aunt Jo” had a heart that was overflowing with love, she was not immune from the trials and tests of life that also knocked loudly at her door. However, the confidence and calm serenity that comes only through prayer would be present when she faced whatever life might hold. No matter what waited around the bend in life, her faith in God meant that dawn would follow night.

The Hardest Test

Sometimes, although desirous of holding onto our glory moments of the present, the length of life is not in our control. Over the years, Mary Josephine Pascall, now known as “Aunt Jo”, had enjoyed the outstretched arms and warm embrace of her adoptive mother, Ella Massey Thompkins, with such depth that the hidden pain suffered in childhood had been healed and replaced by deep shining pools of love.

Therefore, when it became obvious that her mother's health was declining, Ella was invited to spend the rest of her life under her daughter's watchful eyes. Moving in with her daughter seemed to please Ella so much that each day together was counted as a blessing.

During the day, it was necessary for both Grant and Mary to continue working, which meant being away from home. At first, Ella was able to function well with this arrangement and all was peaceful and calm. However, things changed dramatically one day when she simply was no where to be found. After a long and frantic search, the family finally located Ella walking on the busy railroad tracks, totally unaware of her surroundings; a condition that was to be constant.

Today, Ella's disease would be labeled differently, but then was diagnosed as being mentally insane. After thoroughly searching for a possible solution to the problem, there was no other choice but to move her to an institution located in Fulton, Missouri. Even though the distance was great, Grant and Mary would faithfully visit her every possible moment.

Unfortunately, as the disease progressed, the mother Mary knew so well became closed into herself, totally unaware of her surroundings. The long goodbye labeled as Alzheimer's today, deeply saddened a daughter that held such immense love for her mother.

Today, Mary recounts the passing of her mother as one of the saddest times of her entire life. As Grant and Mary departed the institution after each visit, they could hear Ella's beautiful soprano voice singing 'In The Garden'; her favorite hymn. As she raised her voice in praise to God, the words would vibrate throughout the facility and down the lane in front of the entrance. These beautiful notes that flowed so powerfully from her mother's voice became permanently imprinted in Mary's mind.

Thus, the haunting strains of that song are present in Mary's mind even at age 91. However, each time the replay of the song ends and the quiet becomes almost deafening, she knows they are not lost from one another forever, but are only separated for awhile. Soon, both of their voices will join God's choir of saints and angels and the notes they sing will be for all eternity. They will have a permanent home "In The Garden" of the New Jerusalem.

The Clock Ticks

As silver strands appeared in Grant and "Aunt Jo's" hair, they knew it was time to pass the running of Pascall's Smokehouse Restaurant into younger, more energetic hands. Although they tried unsuccessfully to rent the restaurant, it

became necessary to sell to a man that had arrived from Kansas City. Even though they both felt a strong attachment to a business they had started from scratch, its success meant allowing another person's capable hands to determine the best course. Consequently, the hard work that had begun as only a dream to the Pascalls, today, is called Cross Town Barbecue; a well know and successful restaurant.

Life Goes On

The lives of Grant and Mary Josephine (Aunt Jo) Pascall settled into a peaceful harmony; a time to thoroughly enjoy one another. Although they continued to work hard, they always stopped to enjoy hobbies and laughs together. Since Grant was an avid hunter, he not only enjoyed the sport, but delighted in the beauty of the countryside.

Therefore, they purchased property located east of Springfield and named it The Pea Patch. Since the sight had a house and an enormous pond, it became the hub for family and church picnics, alike. Today, Mary and her great niece, Thresna, will go into fits of laughter as they recall the memory of a relative who chose to sit at the top of a hill, too close to the edge, and precede to roll chair over head like a big red ball until reaching the bottom down by the water.

After watching two strong male relatives use great effort and patience to return her safely to the spot at the top of the hill, all seemed calm and back to normal; at least they thought. Mary remarked, "We would have labeled the incident as an unfortunate accident had she not chosen to sit in the same chair, too close to the edge again. Not learning her lesson, she repeated the performance of rolling chair over head all the way to the bottom. Honey, at that point, it had become pure, unadulterated foolishness!"

Mary continued, "It was an absolute miracle that she ended up unhurt although as mad as a hornet. We all watched her walk off in a huff, lips puckered in a circle mumbling well, well, well, to herself. Child, I'll bet every muscle in her body was complaining as she got out of bed the next morning."

As the people who were picnicking at the Pea Patch arrived and departed, a sign that read, "POOR BUT PROUD" located above the gate brought a smile to their faces.

Dancing Feet Still Alive

Although the Pascalls lived a humble life of simplicity in every way, the joy of ballroom dancing soon called them back into the world of romance and grace. The thrill of floating together as they moved across the floor never failed to draw them. They could almost hear the tapping of shoes beckoning them from their closet. Then, they would excitedly adorn their bodies with whatever fancy clothes and jewelry they possessed, and slip quickly into those “already tapping” dance shoes. Live bands and a singing group called The Philharmonics would beckon them to the American Legion Hall or the Ritz Club located on old Route 66. The lively music and dancing at these two halls made living through the depression easier for everyone. Mary's friend, Homer Boyd exclaimed, “I was just as poor at the beginning of the depression as at the end. It didn't bother me a bit! We just kept singing and dancing through it all.” Each time the music started, the Pascalls would float effortlessly into the clouds of romance together; a habit that would last a lifetime.

A Time For Every Season

All up and down Fremont Avenue, the seasons came and the seasons went, covering the earth with a splendor that only God could create. Each spring filled the air with promises of hope and, in perfect time, surrendered to summer with a peaceful, elegant departing grace. Then in a beautifully written orchestration, the last days of summer were cooled by the crisp frosty air of autumn, turning the landscape into fiery colors of red, yellow and orange. Against this dramatic backdrop, somehow finding its way through the misty air came the surprising caress of the first snowflake that would playfully dance upon the faces of the two soul mates, Mary and Grant Pascall, as they embraced the day with their usual untamed enthusiasm.

Thus, this was the rhythm of the pendulum of life, repeating itself year after year; the order and wonder of the business of an ever changing earth. For the “crazy in love” young couple, time seemed to pass unseen; as the flow of birth and death arrived noisily and departed quietly.

Without notice, the sound of the dancing shoes that once beckoned loudly from the closet, faded softly and vanished completely into the distant horizon. The gray that appeared around Mary and Grant's temples gave testimony to a willing spirit, minus the agility of the once gliding feet.

Without fail, the changing of the seasons stirred within the heart of the great hunter, Grant, a yearning to walk the wooded hillsides in search of the wild game he had always provided for their table. Thus, it was due to this unrequited yearning that he packed his jeep and traveled the winding country roads with his friends to enjoy the hunting trip of his life. Unfortunately, this was to be the final hurrah for the great hunter.

One morning, just as the hunting party was starting the day, Grant was stricken violently by an affliction that left him totally incapacitated. As a result, Mary was startled to see his friends pull into the driveway transporting a gravely ill Grant. Sadly, the diagnosis from the physician indicated that Grant had suffered a massive stroke. Strange, how the morning air at the time of his departure seemed fresh and lively, but had ended in causing worry along with life changing pain all around.

Although Mary was well trained in caring for people who suffered from ill health, the effects from the stroke were challenging. In spite of the difficulties his stroke presented, they faced each day with smiles and grateful hearts. However, providing daily care for Grant proved to be such a daunting task for Mary, that after 5 years, she too, succumbed to a stroke that affected her ability to walk and restricted the use of her right side. As a result, Mary and Grant had no other option but to move into a health care facility. Thus, Christian Health Care became their new residence of choice.

Due to the seriousness of Grant 's condition, it was necessary for the couple to take up residence in separate rooms, a change that was accepted, but presented an enormous adjustment. How does one face separation from a soul mate who has been a loyal partner for over 60 years? How is it possible to have your world turned upside down at age 88 and keep a stiff upper lip?

When observing the attitudes in this society, hearing the cries of the afflicted seem all too common place; blaming God for their lots in life. Thus, a pattern of

depression and self pity become the greatest enemy of the soul; causing a deterioration of both mind and spirit.

When Mary Josephine recounts their arrival at the nursing home, she admits openly that they were faced with an enormous life changing challenge. After all, two healthy, vibrant people had suddenly been reduced to needing caretakers for surviving each day. This new life style change would certainly rock Mary to the core of her being and test the faith she had always proclaimed in her Glorious Father. The happy song of her life had ended, and was being replaced by the falling of a deafening quiet upon every aspect of her existence. How would she loosen her grip on the precious memories locked deeply within her breast?

Perhaps, a powerful quote from the Talmud, the authoritative body of Jewish traditions answers the dilemma by stating, God says to man: "With thy very wounds I will heal thee."

The faithful Christian who had lifted up the cares and concerns of others all her life to God in prayer, now needed to allow His mighty arms to hold her in a tender, comforting embrace. Romans 12:2 best depicts the course of direction Mary decided to take by saying, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer."

Thus, Mary devoted much time each day in quiet prayer with her Heavenly Father. In addition she followed her words with a time of quiet meditation, listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, in a short time, a peace that passes all understanding which comes only from God, filled her heart and mind with a new, vibrant hope to begin each day. Her Heavenly Father knew she was at a cross road in life and would never leave or forsake her. He would provide the courage to face whatever the future held.

Healing A Broken Heart

Thus, it was in this spirit that God prepared Mary to face the departure of her soul mate, Grant, only one short year later. The love of her life, a loyal partner for over 61 years, had now departed, leaving her totally alone. Mary will tell you that out of a need to be alone, she sought quiet coves in the nursing home to grieve for her precious husband. In those moments of sadness, Mary repeatedly asked

herself if it would be possible to face this long, dark night of her soul.

However, sometimes it is in the dark of our night seasons that we don't know with whom we are struggling until the light begins to dawn. One thing the Bible teaches is that God invites us to cry out to Him allowing our sorrows to soar up to the heavens. He is always waiting anxiously to comfort His precious children when the storms of life threaten to engulf them in murky deep currents.

Therefore, it was necessary for Mary to confront her worst fears and share them with her best friend, Jesus. Was she afraid because of being alone, without any family? Missing Grant caused a deep void during the day and a heart filled with sorrow throughout the long nights. Thus, it was during this time that Mary lifted her voice in many anguished prayers to her faithful Friend. When reciting the verses of her favorite hymn, "What A Friend We Have In Jesus," glimpses of dawn began to shine through the night. Without doubt, Mary knew the answer would be found by resting in the hollow of His hand where her broken spirit could be healed. Romans 5: 5 describes Mary's approach in separating herself from the past and embracing the future with these powerful words, "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings; because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

Over time, the theme of God's destiny for her life began to emerge with a strength that was noticed by everyone she met. After all, she believed the love she had been shown as a little orphan girl was not hers for the "keepin" but for the givin!" Although she now had salt and pepper hair and a new address, her mission still lived deep within her heart. Therefore, her old habit of never meeting a stranger started to surface with great drama. Her watchful eyes observed the needs and personalities of her fellow residents and caretakers, as well. She offered laughter to the sad faces, peace to the angry, encouragement to the downtrodden, sympathy for the challenged, and gratitude to her skilled caregivers.

Revival Of Spirit

As Mary became more acquainted with the residents living around her, she repeatedly shared her deepest concern. In a serious voice she explained the depth of needs she witnessed by stating, "There are so many people living here that need

to be taken under our wings. After we gently pull them to our bosoms, we need to protect and nurture each soul as we float along with them.”

She continued, “When I came here, I knew I could make a difference because a few of the residents reminded me of my children. Some felt they were way above others and chose to look down on the helpless. My mother used to say those that are considered to be way above others are called “kissin” cousins, with the lowly being labeled as “kickin” cousins. The attitude you bring to life determines who wants to be around you. If you are easy to love, people will feel it and gravitate toward you. Be careful! One day you may think you are a “kissin” cousin and be surprised to see your name on the list of “kickin” cousins.”

Recalling her arrival she commented, “When I look back, I thought I would be here about 7 months, but am now in my 7th year, instead. I am so thankful I have a home. The food is not prepared by my own taste bud, but is nourishing to the body. The people here love me with all their hearts and are doing the best they can for everyone. I am excited about almost everything. My cup is always close to over flowing, no matter my circumstances. If I have only one slice of bread, it will always be divided among those around me. Most of the people who live here know that I love them and don't mind my setting them straight. When you look way down deep in each heart, hate is not what you see, but love instead. Fear causes a person to react with hurtful actions toward another.”

Thus, it was in this spirit that Mary Josephine Pascall approached life without her soul mate, in a strange place that was to be her final earthly address. As she took part in the activities, God's love that had poured so freely from her heart all her life continued to radiate everywhere. If a fellow resident had lost the ability to use her hands, Mary's fingers were automatically there to offer assistance. Today, it is a common occurrence to see Mary playing bingo cards or moving dominoes on her behalf as well as others. The ease with which Mary Josephine interacts with her fellow residents as she moves about in her wheel chair is astounding. Her voice can be heard tenderly encouraging the ones that are without the ability to reason any longer as she wheels herself to the rooms of the bedridden residents for a chat.

Melody, Assistant Activity Director, has indicated repeatedly that Mary has no idea of how many lives she has touched over the years. No matter her circumstances, she just keeps living her destiny and delivering God's precious love to everyone she meets. When facing adversity or a challenge, her enormously

creative mind swings into immediate action. This is evident by the manner in which she communicates with a gentleman that has no ability to speak. Recognizing his desire to communicate, and the joy that exudes from his sparkling eyes, she has designed an extremely unique manner in which to carry on a conversation with him. Resembling two doves sitting on a wire, she nods her head and blinks her eyes at him, and he returns the favor in kind. They will sit for a bit each day, using this method of communication, oblivious to everyone around.

Another special friend asks for his gurney to be pushed beside Mary's wheel chair, knowing she will make a face and click her tongue at him. In response, he will raise his gnarled hands into a fist, pretending to take a swing at her. This routine always produces gurgles of playful laughter between them.

God's Magnetic Love

Consequently, day after day as Mary's dedicated care takers tended to her every need, the love that permeated every fiber of her being overflowed into their hearts as well. Thus, it took only a short time for one of her caregivers, Paula Williams, to assign her the name change God had planned for Mary during this season of her life; "Mama Jo." Her new name was indicative of the wisdom she now possessed in relating to others at this point in her journey.

Therefore, one and all at Christian Health Care know her today by the name, "Mama Jo," only. It is truly remarkable to note that during the unfolding of every season in Mary's Christian walk that each name God assigned to her matched with absolute perfection.

Humor Abounds

A quote from Proverbs 15: 13 best describes the personality "Mama Jo" possessed that caused the dark clouds to disappear from the sky all her life. "A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken."

When one takes measure of a life well lived, its depth will be connected directly to the ability to savor each day's blend of flavors, no matter the outcome. The remedy for loneliness and longing for the good old days is a faith that smiles.

Thus, Mary Josephine, now called “Mama Jo,” began each day with a prayer, followed by honest work, a bit of play and an enormous bundle of love to share with all. Humor abounded from her entire being in the form of cleverness, laughter and fun. It took only a short time in her presence to identify the twinkle in her eyes that announced the arrival of a joke, humorous story, or teasing remark.

Once at Christmas time, she asked the Activity Director, Tammy, what she would like Santa to put in her stocking. Since staff members were not allowed to accept gifts, Tammy quickly replied, “Absolutely nothing. We are not allowed to receive gifts from residents.” However, “Mama Jo's” desire to give was not curtailed a bit as she continued to hammer the question home on a daily basis. One day as a show of humor on Tammy's part she stated to “Mama Jo”. “A million dollars would be great!”

Therefore, on Christmas morning, Tammy was mortified to find a present addressed to her from “Mama Jo.” Before Tammy could refuse to open it, “Mama Jo” assured her the contents would not break the employee rule at all. Inside the package, Tammy found one million dollars in play money; a gift that was so treasured that even her own children and grandchildren were not allowed to touch this rich precious endowment.

Another time, when “Mama Jo's “ humor arrived in full bloom was on April Fools Day. As Debbie, a staff member, was preparing to start her daily task of cleaning each room, she was carefully loading her cart with all the necessary supplies. “Mama Jo” came rolling down the hallway with joy in her heart and that twinkle in her eyes. Stopping her wheel chair beside Debbie's cart, she seriously stated, “Oh, Debbie! One of your wheels is coming off!” Quickly dropping to her knees, Debbie started inspecting each wheel with great concern in order to prevent an accident. When she was ready to scrutinize the final wheel, “Mama Jo” gleefully called out, “April Fool!” This brought laughter throughout the day for everyone.

Dark Clouds

Even when 'Mama Jo's” day arrived with cloudy skies instead of sunshine, her faith that smiles overcame the darkness and worry. Recently when she suffered a second stroke and was rushed immediately to the hospital, the sense of humor and

joy still surfaced with the attending physicians, nurses, and all staff members. Word soon spread among them that “Mama Jo” was a real character. When a young student learning to be a speech therapist was attending to Mary's needs, he was making great efforts to be sophisticated and extremely professional with all his conduct. Before departing her room the evening before her release, he continued the professional dialog enunciating each word carefully. As Mary listened to every word her expression was absolutely priceless. That devilish twinkle started to dance in her eyes which indicated the young man was just about to be leveled.

She held up her hand and stated, “I will make you a deal. When I get to heaven, I'll wait for you at the gate. Then when you arrive, I'll give you a good “spankin.” He totally lost his composure, burst into laughter and commented, “By the time I get through misbehaving down here, I will have earned that spanking for sure.”

Good Deeds Are Contagious

When one considers how rapidly the footsteps of good deeds spread throughout the universe and penetrate within the hearts of others, it is truly a mystery that only God comprehends. The quiet touch of gentle hands accompanied by a tender smile enters the deepest recess of the human soul; unlike the penetration of any living organism on the planet. Only the righteous deeds delivered with love, serve as the healing balm and courage needed to face the obstacles and foes of daily living. That is why our God patiently offers ample preparation for each of us to dawn His full armor in becoming servants to those in need.

Mark 10: 43-45 states: “Whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be a slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Our Heavenly Father fully recognizes that far more than just spontaneous reactions are needed to satisfy the hunger of the human soul. It is easy to overlook the waves of changing emotions in facial expressions or identify sadness settling softly into liquid brown melancholy eyes.

Allowing God to mold us into His mighty instruments soon changes every part of

our beings. Instead of focusing inward, our eyes will soon be scanning the horizon like brightness streaming from a light house across the vast space of ocean waters. We will be fully conscious that it is not about us, but all about God's destiny for our lives. It will become abundantly clear that we are here at our Creator's pleasure and for His divine purpose.

As Mary Josephine, now called 'Mama Jo,' had walked along the curved paths and climbed the highest mountains of her life, God had been molding her like a clay jar, turning her into His masterpiece. The lives she would touch on her journey were already planned in advance of her entrance into this world. God makes no mistakes and is surprised by nothing.

All these truths were evident in the reaction of the residents and staff members when "Mama Jo" returned from the second life threatening stroke. Even though she needed to be placed in a different room, her faithful friends knew when she returned and quickly located her new address. It was a common occurrence to see sixteen or more visitors at once trying to get a glimpse of her face, making sure she was on track for recovery. There was a constant flow of feet and wheel chairs moving in and out of her bouquet filled room. "Mama Jo," in her usual humble style, could not imagine what all the fuss was about.

At another time, while on an excursion to the Springfield History Museum of Greene County for a private meeting, that humble spirit sprang forth again. Mary knew the gracious staff at the museum would be receiving her as a VIP so she could look at photos from her past and asked the writer the most precious question. As she was being wheeled down the hallway toward her transportation, she inquired, "What have I ever done in my life to deserve this special day?"

It was a pleasure to be a spectator at this private meeting as she joyfully reviewed pictures of people from her past and recalled their names with ease. At the end of the meeting when jazz music performed by The Philharmonics was played, the braid on the back of her head started to sway in perfect time. The group surrounding her marveled as she sang right along in perfect harmony. Her playfulness and humor won the hearts of everyone around. Later, when arriving back at Christian Health Care, it was truly amazing to observe the welcome home greetings from her friends. Word had already preceded her return of this spectacular celebration at the museum.

Reminiscing With Friends

Proverbs 17: 22 best describes the key to the steady stream of visitors that constantly flowed through all the seasons of “Mama Jo's” life with these words. “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.”

While “Mama Jo” was still regaining her strength from the second stroke, two long time friends, Homer Boyd and Alfred Culp from her old neighborhood, stopped in for a time of rejoicing together. Although the light in her room had been dimmed in preparation for a nap, the arrival of these two friends turned the space into a live field of electrical energy. Forget the nap! Mary sat up with an enormous smile on her face and began the conversation as if their time together was only yesterday. Since both Homer and Alfred still sang in a group called The Philharmonics, they broke into a lively rendition of “All Shook Up!”

Not about to be left out, “Mama Jo” sat up even higher on her pillows, wiggled that braid on her head and joined right in. Their merry hearts certainly acted like medicine for the three of them and all who passed in the hallway. Everyone who happened by would pause, smile approvingly and nod; gestures that added evidence to how contagious a cheerful spirit is to others.

As the conversation among the three friends took on a more serious tone, “Mama Jo” assured them that she was content with her present surroundings. She was making sure neither of them felt sympathy regarding her need to recuperate in bed for awhile.

Again, the musical friends, Alfred and Homer, broke into the song “Any Place I Hang My Hat Is Home,” which fit the situation perfectly. Mary's voice joined them within seconds, which meant all was well.

As the last note ended, Mary continued, “I'm here and I don't regret it because I know there is something left for me to do. Besides, this address is just another earthly stop, not my eternal home. It's God's timing, not mine. I will go when He wants me. All in His good time!”

Suddenly, her friend, Homer agreed by sharing his near death experience with Mary. After having a heart attack and touching the shores of heaven, a voice

asked him, “Why are you here?” Homer answered, “I think this is where I am supposed to be.” However, the most crystal clear voice Homer had ever heard in his life commanded, “You go back. When I get ready for you, I'll come and get you myself.”

Later, after being asked what God looked like by his friends, Homer boldly replied, “I did not look. I became a Christian through faith, not sight! When I finish with my earthly assignment, I'm out of here! Don't cry for me because I know where I'm going and who is coming to get me!”

After the two faithful visitors bade a happy farewell, and the light was once again dimmed in their old friend's room, the setting sun signaled the end to a perfect day. As Mary rejoiced over the blessings these two friends had delivered, her heart was bursting with love; full to overflowing. She did not know when the benediction of her life would come, but still felt a calming assurance that only God could provide.

Even though her health was failing, entering into the gates of heaven meant total renewal in the form of a new body; fullness and eternal life that only the arms of Jesus could deliver. All was well with her soul! His will be done! Hallelujah! Amen!



Mary and Grant ready to dance. Grant the Great Hunter. Mary training her pet dog.
(All three pictures courtesy of Treshna Stephens, Mary's great niece.)



Mary providing health care.



Mary and Grant bragging on size of fish caught.

(Both pictures courtesy of Treshna Stephens, Mary's great niece.)



Grant after stroke wearing mickey mouse ears.



Mary after stroke (middle picture)



**Treshna and family on the day
Mary decided in favor of nursing
home care.**



Cross Town Barbecue as it appears in 2009.



Eddie Nickoles and Mary shaking their fists at each other in fun; an everyday occurrence at Christian Health Care.



Mary and Tammy, Activity Director at Christian Health Care.



Melody Assistant Activity Director and Mary at Christian Health Care.



Payton Herd, age 7, reading The Icky Sticky Frog to Mary, age 91. Shows how much Mary still loves children.