



*reface*

“Yes or no?” I looked into my husband’s pale blue eyes, but I knew that he didn’t have the answer. Dish towel in hand, I stood in the bedroom with Tad while the guests gathered in the living room. I was about to serve lunch, but I needed to speak to Tad before we sat at the table and I lost my chance to confer with him privately.

“Am I or am I not supposed to write the book?” I continued. “Maybe I misread the signs. Maybe they weren’t from God. Maybe I got carried away with the idea of becoming an author. Maybe I’m wasting my time trying to write something no one will read. I would like to know once and for all, am I supposed to write this book or not? I wish God would give me a sign through Pastor Michael.”

I had skipped the morning’s church service that late April Sunday in order to cook lunch for the visiting pastor, deacon, and others from the Cortland and Ithaca churches and our home church in Rochester, New York. I was sorry not that I had missed the sermons, but that after preaching, I had missed being present while the visiting Pastor Michael walked around the sanctuary and prophesied over various individuals. I so wanted to hear from God about this book that I thought I was to write. You see, the book is about my year battling cancer—not a topic I had ever considered writing about. Yet the day I got diagnosed, a friend told me, “You should journal through your cancer.” Two days later, another friend said, “You have

to journal through your experience. It will help others.” Since two people with whom I can’t remember ever discussing journaling told me to journal through my cancer experience, I recognized it was God speaking through them. I hadn’t planned on journaling about my cancer, but I journaled. And journaled and journaled, sometimes writing for hours in the hush of the night. At the end of the year, I sent out a Christmas newsletter based on my journal, and a different friend asked me, “Have you considered writing a book?”

*I hear you Lord*, I thought. So I started to transcribe and edit my hundreds of handwritten pages. I wrote faithfully and fervently—until a couple of months into the project I got sick with a bad cold. I had been working full-time, homeschooling my youngest, and balancing a myriad of household tasks along with the writing when the three-week-long cold sent me to bed and disrupted my routine. The illness completely derailed my book project. And with the coming of spring, the gardens beckoned. Doubts crept in.

“After lunch, I’ll ask Pastor Michael to pray for you,” Tad assured me.

We went back to our guests, and I served the meal I’d prepared. Conversation bounced from church affairs to mission trips to people we knew in both the U.S. and in Ukraine, where my husband and the visitors were all born. I served sautéed chicken and scalloped potatoes and salad. My younger daughter helped me bring out dessert and tea. At no time did Tad mention my dilemma.

As the guests prepared to leave, Tad spoke up. “Kathryn would like you to pray for her,” he said to Pastor Michael.

We knelt on the hardwood floor of the living room. All eleven of us raised our voices together in communal prayer. Then after a moment, Pastor Michael’s voice rose above the others:

“Yes or no? Yes, I want you to speak. I want you to share. I will heap blessings upon blessings on you...”

A shock went through me. The Creator of the Universe, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—

He repeated my question to me before He answered it! The one and only God Almighty, the God who had spoken to Moses—He actually responded to this trivial question of one tiny speck of humanity on this earth and answered it so directly. I was amazed. Dazzled. Stunned. For weeks, I was as awed as if I myself had seen the burning bush.

Perhaps it's silly that we don't believe that the God of the Bible is the same God today that He was back when Moses walked the earth and David fought Goliath. Christianity today has been so watered down that many people think that miracles and actual encounters with God don't exist anymore. They do! But you need to slow down, and in the stillness, ask with all your heart and be willing to listen with all your soul.

*And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*

– Jeremiah 29:13 (NKJV)

This is my story...

# *F*oreshadowing

When the doorbell rang, I was at my computer in my home office writing e-mails. Why would my husband or kids ring the doorbell when I purposely left the front door unlocked?

I went to the front entry hall expecting to see my three teenage children coming home from the evening youth group meeting, but instead I saw three other teens, friends of my children, on the front porch.

“We came to pray for you,” said eighteen-year-old Tatiana in her ever-calm voice.

I was confused. How could she know? I had gotten the diagnosis earlier that evening right before my husband Tad left for the youth group meeting.

I opened the door wider.

“Come into the living room,” I invited Tatiana and her two younger brothers, Myron and Michael. “So you heard?”

“Yes, we heard. We were in youth group tonight and Brother Tad asked for prayer for you.”

My visitors did not take off their winter coats as they came into the living room. We knelt on the Turkish carpet in the circle of warmth cast by the wood-burning stove. As we bowed our heads, Tatiana began:

“Thank you, Lord, for Sister Kathryn. Thank you for loving her enough to trust her with this illness. Thank you for giving her the strength to deal with it...”

She made it sound like God allowing this illness in my life was a privilege, a disguised blessing.

Next, fifteen-year-old Myron prayed. Referring to Matthew 25:35-40, he thanked God for my hands and feet, for using me to feed Jesus, clothe Jesus, visit Jesus in jail. He thanked God for my example of serving the poor in Africa and Mexico and other places.

I was weeping by then. I had no idea that I had touched the lives of these teenagers. I was surprised that they would drive to my house to pray for me, arriving even before my own family came home. Most teenagers just don't think that way.

Michael, the youngest, remained quiet. I prayed next, thanking God for their uplifting visit. When we got up, Tatiana wrapped me in a big hug. Myron, who towered above me, reached over and hugged me.

“Mom...” he said, and I smiled through my tears. Calling me “Mom” has been our joke since the mission trip to Mexico two-and-a-half years before. My husband and I had taken our three teenagers and four others from the church youth group to Mexico to distribute used clothing and school supplies to the Chinanteco tribe deep in the verdant hills of Oaxaca. We lived in the thatch-covered huts with black scorpions, spiders the size of small rodents, and people who were more hospitable than my grandmother. One day, the missionary we were serving with, Paul Gonzalez, told Myron, “Go call your mom. Tell her to come out here.”

“But my mom isn't here,” Myron, puzzled, explained to Paul.

“Yes, she is. Go get her.”

“But she's not here!”

“Yes, she is. She's in the house,” insisted Paul. “Tell her to come out here.”

Then Myron realized that Paul had mistaken him for my son Jacob. So Myron went into the house and called me—and has jokingly called me “Mom” ever since.

After their prayer, Tatiana, Myron, and Michael refused my invitation to stay. They left, walking into the brisk darkness of the winter night. Their gesture was so unexpected, so touching.

But it was Tatiana’s prayer that echoed in my heart and set the stage for what was to come.