

# inklings



celebrating the art of written expression ~ composed by  
people from the Living Word Community Church family

Winter Edition: January—March 2010

# [the Arts @ LWCC]

The Arts Ministry of Living Word wants to awaken the artist within you. This ministry is here to encourage everyone: the artistic dabblers to the established artists and especially those who are interested in developing their creative life. It's true, we are all created in God's image – which means we all have the ability to create. Is something holding you back? Let's dive into our God-given creativity in the context of a grace-filled community.

**[the Arts @ LW] Blog:** [www.lwcc-arts.blogspot.com](http://www.lwcc-arts.blogspot.com)

## Our Current Arts Communities

*Aperture* – photography, no fancy cameras required!

*Pages* – writing group for both men and women

***Inklings** is a result of the writing communities of LW and is published four times a year: January ~ April ~ July ~ October.*

*To submit your written piece(s) for consideration in Inklings, email deAnn Roe at [droe@lwccyork.com](mailto:droe@lwccyork.com).*

## the studio

*A monthly gathering for established and emerging visual artists to connect as artists to other artists, to the church, to the community, and more importantly, to God. The studio meets on the third Wednesday of each month from 7:00—8:30 PM in the Gallery @ Common Grounds, LW's coffee bar.*

## The Gallery @ CGCB

Calling all artists! The gallery exhibits change every six weeks and we need your art to grace the walls of the Common Grounds Coffee Bar. Call deAnn to have your art considered for an upcoming exhibit. We have space for wall-hung art and three-dimensional art.

To hear more, contact deAnn at 755.0089 x126 or [droe@lwccyork.com](mailto:droe@lwccyork.com)

And don't forget to check out [www.verticalcreativity.blogspot.com](http://www.verticalcreativity.blogspot.com)



# My Christmas Memory

Who knew that my most cherished Christmas memory would be one that took place in the beginning of November? It doesn't involve snow, pine trees, ornaments, ridiculous amounts of cookies, or any of the other details that surround the rest of my holiday memories. It involves one guy and a little place in Georgia.

It was early November, and after a tedious 16-hour drive we arrived at Fort Benning, Georgia. The air was at least 30 degrees warmer than it should be to celebrate a winter holiday, and the lack of the usual Christmas décor didn't help to get me into the holiday spirit. But then it happened.

My brother, stationed at Fort Benning and soon to be deployed for the war, wouldn't be home for the holidays. We were celebrating them early with him in Georgia. We sat in his tiny room and exchanged small gifts wrapped in newspaper, stripped of their glossy "come get me" attitude. I opened the card from my usually emotionally distant brother and broke down. Inside he had written me a very candid letter about how much our relationship has improved and how much he loves me, despite the non-emotional ways in which he shows it. You don't understand... I had been waiting my entire life to feel like my brother respected me and loved me. This was all I could ever need. But he wasn't done yet.

The next day at the mall he surprised me with a gift certificate to Coach, my favorite store. I own one other piece from Coach, one that my brother also bought for me. He smiled easily as I freaked out and wandered the store like a kid

## My Christmas Memory [con't]

in a candy shop; I had never been in the store with an actual intent or ability to purchase anything. We, as brother and sister, settled on a pair of classic leather boots and he watched as I enthusiastically handed the gift certificate over to the cashier. It was a bonding moment that I didn't know was possible for us. Now, I know that Christmas memories aren't supposed to be about a *thing*, no material object should mean that much to someone; to which I would have to say, let's make an exception for this one.

It meant so much to me because my brother opened up to me and demonstrated his interest in what I am interested in in a way that I thought he never would. The letter will probably go in my wallet so that I can read it whenever I miss him and need to know he loves me. The boots will be worn always in a state of reverence and awe for my brother and the fact that he really does think I'm a pretty worthwhile girl. That's the best present anyone can ever receive—to know that after all this time someone they really respect returns the respect and the love.

By Brittany O.

To read more from Brittany, visit her blog:

[www.purposefulwanderings17.blogspot.com](http://www.purposefulwanderings17.blogspot.com)

# My Favorite Christmas

“Alright kids,” grammy said to me and my other two siblings, a warm smile on her face, her silver, box-like haircut bouncing atop her head. “We’re each going to take a turn, starting with the oldest.”

It was always exciting for me when she said this, as I was the first grandson, and most Christmases the order in which we took our turns was reversed. Last year, I had patiently waited for my sister and brother to locate and sort through their own gifts, but this year was different. This was my time!

I had asked for art materials, a drawing pad and pencils, and another book—Robinson Crusoe, I believe. It was something that I consistently asked for growing up. To this day, as an artist and reader, I still hope for a tablet and a novel.

“Hey. Hey. Buddy!” my gramps said, his shiny, bald head glistening as he hugged me. “Ready to find your first big present?” I emphatically nodded, excited. My brother, sister, and I knew that he and my grammy had spent the previous night sitting in the kitchen, writing down clues that rhymed, clues eventually leading to the gift.

Gramps handed me the first clue written on a small piece of paper. I took it over to my parents, who helped me read it. Dad and mom usually said together, “Wow, Josh! What does it say?” I then would read it aloud, and they’d encourage me to follow the clue. In this case, the clue indicated that the second clue was in the garage somewhere.

Still in my pajamas, I walked with my gramps around

the big Christmas tree, through a pile of leftover gift-wrapping paper, and past a comfortable recliner placed just in front of a CD player, which constantly played Bocelli or the Three Tenors.

Throughout the split-level home, you could hear grandfather clocks chiming, smell grammy's apple dumplings and pumpkin pie, and my mom's famous scrambled egg casserole, which was cooking in the oven. As my gramps and I ascended from the lower level, headed into the dining room, and then into the kitchen, the delicious smells grew stronger. I took in a deep breath as I neared the garage door, which was just beyond the kitchen area.

"Okay, Josh," gramps said, as animated as ever.

"Where do you think it is?"

Having thoroughly roamed the premises during previous vacations, I learned the basic hiding places: in the mulch beneath my grammy's planters, in the horns of my gramps' mounted deer head, between the numerous paint cans that lined the garage walls, to name a few. So, naturally, I checked these places. I was surprised to learn, however, that the second clue wasn't in any of these locales.

"Can't find it, buddy?" asked my gramps, smiling and acting oblivious to its whereabouts. "How about there?" He pointed at a coat rack full of hunting attire, to one of the camouflage coat's open pockets. Sure enough, there it was. I never thought to check there, I noted. I need to remember that!

After grabbing the second clue, gramps and I went

back inside, where it was warm and smelled great. I proudly yelled, "I found it!" The entire family applauded, pleased with my efforts, and enjoying my success.

My mom said, "What's it say, honey?" I looked down at the piece of paper, smiled.

"Yeah, buddy," dad added. "What'd you find?"

Gramps and I again made our way through the kitchen and dining room. My mom's egg casserole was almost all done, its aroma permeating the air. We didn't go back downstairs, but rather prepared to continue the search.

I told them that the clue indicated my big present was in an upstairs bedroom. I assumed it was in my grandparents' room, since they had hidden clues there in the past. So I scampered up to their room. But, again, I soon learned that I was wrong.

"I guess it's not in here," my grammy happily said, coming up behind me. "Let's check the back room, where your great grandma used to sleep."

I scanned the small room, growing perplexed as the moments went by. And then I looked in the closet. I saw a wrapped box and thought I found my big present. But then I opened it. Another clue! You've got to be kidding me!

I eventually found my pad, pencils, and book under my grandparents' bed, and my family and I celebrated my discovery. I was so excited. I got exactly what I wanted! My brother and sister went on the same adventure, and also got what they wanted. In my opinion, though, I made out the best.

Later that morning, my mom, dad, grammy, gramps, brother, sister, and I sat around the dinner table and celebrated Christ's birth. We all held hands while gramps said a long prayer, sat somewhat still as he read a New Testament Bible passage, and then we all ate mom's awesome egg casserole and grammy's treats. What a Christmas!

By Josh Holmes

## PAGES

### Writing Group

This writing group meets on the second Thursday of each month, 7:00—8:30 PM in the large conference room (across from the church kitchen) at Living Word Community Church. Bring your laptop or notebook and a writing project you've been working on OR we'll have writing prompts for you to choose from.

Contact deAnn Roe with questions: [droe@lwccyork.com](mailto:droe@lwccyork.com) or 755-0089 x126.

## Christmas 1958

Christmas 1958 was still a time of innocence in many ways. The civil rights' marches, women's liberation, the Bay of Pigs and the Kennedy assassinations, Vietnam protests, mini-skirts, the Beatles and the British music invasion, birth control pills, Woodstock, long-haired hippies, yuppies, Earth Day, Saturday Night Fever, personal computers, the Internet, global warming, the Y2K scare, recessions, booms, wars, alienation, loosening of morals, cell phones, 9/11, laptops, You Tube, Facebook, and E-Bay had not occurred yet. Amazon either meant the jungle rain forest or the river. We had not yet been asked what we could do for our country, flown to the moon, questioned every horror, or considered every event as a probable conspiracy. In 1958, television was just beginning to become more common. Only the very wealthy had color television.

In 1958, I was 5 years old and had three younger siblings, another one on the way. My dad was 23 and my mom would be 22 in January. We lived with my grandparents and we all helped in the family business.

My grandmom, Nonny, was a registered nurse with a degree in administration on top of it. She and my granddad, Dada, had purchased a mansion from the Dodge family in Germantown, PA.

They opened Jo-Lynn Hall, a 20 bed nursing home in 1953; the year I was born. We lived on the top floor and the ground floor, the patients were in between. In a way, we children were blessed to be surrounded by so many loving, watchful "grandparents."

Christmas 1958, was still a time of innocence in many ways. We had been “practicing” carols to sing, listening to the story of baby Jesus, and finally, finally the day of the Christmas party arrived. It lasted all day. We began with decorating and setting a special breakfast and everybody got to have at least a special ribbon or tie to wear.

Nonny put the baby Jesus in the crèche. I was allowed to walk around with the cookie plate and offer some to each patient. Then my sister and I were allowed to find the patient that Santa had named as he pulled out a gift. We were allowed to help the recipient open the gift, but only if asked.

Back then, I had no idea that the doctor who came every afternoon to check on each of the patients and his wife had dressed as Santa and Mrs. Claus. I had no idea that each gift had been provided with care by Nonny and the doctor to bring a smile to the eyes of long weary souls.

I also had no idea that it would be the last Christmas for some of them. They were people I loved, who were usually willing to listen to my stories, color, and laugh with me. They were my first friends. They watched out for me and my brothers and sister and we handed them what they wanted that was out of reach and ran to tell Nonny if they needed her.

The minister came and said a prayer, joining us in celebration. And then came the most special part—Christmas of 1958, was the first time I was allowed to sing for the patients with my mother. I thought she had the voice of an angel.

Everyone always loved it when my mother sang, no one more than me.

She stood quietly, closed her eyes and looked up. Her clear soprano filled the air. The beloved carol written by Joseph Mohr in 1816 still brings tears of joy and remembrance. I loved the look of peace and reverence as my mother announced for each of us to hear:

*“Silent night, holy night, All is calm all is bright.  
'Round yon virgin, Mother and Child, Holy infant so tender and  
mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Silent night, holy night, Shepherds quake at the sight.  
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heav'nly hosts sing Alleluia;  
Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.*

*Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light.  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face, With the dawn of redeeming  
grace, Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth; Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.*

*Still the night, holy the night, Sleeps the world, hid from  
sight. Mary and Joseph in stable bare, Watch o'er the child, be-  
loved and fair, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.*

*Still the night, holy the night, Shepherds first saw the  
light. Heard resounding, clear and strong, far and near, the An-  
gels song, Christ the Redeemer is here, Christ the Redeemer is  
here.*

*Still the night, Holy the night, Son of God, Love's pure  
light. Love is smiling from thy face, Christ the Redeemer is here.”*

It wasn't until my mother's voice stilled that I realized I had stood holding her hand, enthralled, looking up at her and listening and had completely forgotten to sing.

By Diane Kollmer Traini, 2009

## ATTENTION WRITERS AND POETS

The **Inklings** publication is released quarterly. The next edition will be in April. If you love to express yourself and/or give glory to God through words, paragraphs, or stanzas, please submit your written pieces for consideration to deAnn Roe by March 19, 2010 via email: [droe@lwccyork.com](mailto:droe@lwccyork.com).

Don't hesitate to contact me regarding questions you may have.

## Cross-Eyed Cow with the Broken Horn

One Christmas, when I was around 12 years old, my mother painted a ceramic nativity scene. I begged her to let me paint one of the pieces. At first, knowing my patience level, she said no. Having five kids, four of them boys, she probably wanted one thing really done nice—no smudges or fingerprints. But I kept bugging her and she finally gave in and let me paint the cow.

I tried to be really careful, or at least as careful as a 12-year-old boy can be. When I finished I was proud of my cow. I showed it to my mother. One of my brothers happened to be walking by and in that loving and supportive way that brothers talk to each other pointed out that my “stupid cow” was cross-eyed. As I was carefully painting each eye, I did not make sure that they actually worked together. Shortly after that someone, probably one of my brothers, in a fit of jealousy dropped my cow and broke one of its horns.

My mother could have bought another cow and painted it herself or just not used a cow, but she didn't. My father had built a stable and when she set up the nativity scene there was the cross-eyed cow with the broken horn sitting in the stall.

Both of my parents are gone now, and I own that nativity scene and stable. Every year I put the cross-eyed cow with the broken horn in his special place in the stable. Does it seem wrong to add this “imperfect” cow to this otherwise “perfect” nativity scene? No other pieces are chipped or cross-eyed. I believe that the cow is probably the closest reminder of the

actual event. We have glamorized the stable into a beautiful serene setting where happy animals gaze lovingly on the Christ child. We have made it a place where shepherds with neatly trimmed beards, washed faces, and combed hair visit an angelic looking Mary.

This is not the reality. God chose to send His only son to a dirty stable. How many of us add a little cow manure to our nativity? The angels did not find the shepherds at the local Holiday Inn, they found them sleeping in the fields. They did not have Listerine, Colgate, or Right Guard available. The first visitors to Jesus were dirty, smelly shepherds who may not have bathed in weeks. Doesn't this only seem appropriate? Jesus was not born to hang out with the Kings—He was here for the hurting and needy.

If you look at your statue of Mary, I bet her angelic face is looking out over spotlessly clean clothing, usually of baby blue and white. Your Joseph is probably equally well-kept with a neatly trimmed beard. This could not have been the reality. They had just traveled a great distance, by donkey. Like the shepherds, they also were not staying at the Holiday Inn. They could not find a room in any Inn. They were dirty, tired, and sweaty. Joseph's beard and hair must have been the least of his worries.

This is the environment that Jesus was born into. Tired, dirty parents in a stable used to keep animals. The primary smell was not disinfectant but cow manure. His first visitors were not neatly trimmed Kings, but shepherds who had spent

the last couple weeks sleeping in fields surrounded by sheep. Do I think the cross-eyed cow with the broken horn belongs in my Nativity Scene? Yes, I do! The cow is a reminder that the actual event was much less glamorous and perfect than we have made it out to be. That cow is a reminder that Jesus was not born in a sterile hospital room but in a dirty stable. His first visitors were not neatly groomed people in hospital gowns but dirty shepherds who hadn't changed clothes in weeks. Isn't His gift that much more inspiring knowing that He humbled Himself to be born into these meager surroundings and that the angels chose to send common people as His first visitors?

By Daniel Roth

## The Christmas Gift

It was Christmas Eve day and I had some shopping to do. My mother and step-dad had recently mentioned they wanted some new music to listen to. Since I knew they loved Gospel music, I headed for a local Christian book store that was going out of business. I knew the sales prices would be good, and I was certain I could find something they would enjoy.

While I was in the store I wandered over to look at Bibles. In my own life my interest in reading the Bible was growing. However, I longed to purchase a Bible which I could say was just mine. As a child I had come to love the sounds of the words of the King James Bible and had memorized verses and chapters in this poetic form. My husband, however, had never read the Bible as a child and felt lost trying to sort out the “thee and thou” of the King James. We had decided to purchase and use a Living Bible in our study time.

I also had another reason for wanting a Bible of my own. Recently my grandmother had passed away. Among her possessions was found a well-loved copy of the Bible. She had made notes in the margins and comments that gave insights into what a particular verse meant to her and what was going on in her life when she read it. I loved the idea of a Bible being such a personal item and considered hers to contain much wisdom left behind for whoever would claim this Bible next. I wanted to have a Bible like hers one day.

At this point in my life there wasn't a lot of money. God always provided enough, but never too much. So I had trouble

deciding to do something for myself instead of the kids and I had put off the idea of buying myself a Bible. Then I stopped on a Christmas errand and thought I would just take a look. My eye quickly fell on a beautiful Bible, a leather-bound edition with gold-trimmed pages. When I opened it I was amazed to find it was a parallel Bible, with the King James words placed alongside the words of the Living Bible! What a perfect Bible for our family. I just knew the price would be far out of my reach, and indeed it had been. The price had started out at \$70.00, a king's ransom to me back then. However, thanks to past sales and the current going out of business sale, the price was now \$19.95! As I left the store I prayed someone would give me money for Christmas so that I could purchase that Bible.

I went home and told my husband about the beautiful Bible I had just seen and how its two different translations would make it perfect for me. I told him also how the sales had affected the price and what my hopes were for Christmas. My husband got a funny smile on his face and said he had something to show me. He told me that after I left for my errands the mail had come. There was a card addressed to me, and since it was probably just a Christmas card he had opened it. He handed it to me and waited for me to discover what it held. The card said that because of all I had done for others in the past year someone wanted to do something nice for me. There was a \$20.00 bill and a note that made it quite clear I

was to spend it on something special for myself and not on the children. With tears in his eyes my husband kissed me and sent me back to the store to get the very special Bible which God had found just for me.

By Linda Radzik

## The Stable

In 1989, at the age of 48, my father died of cancer. It was only years later that I realized the impact that he had on my life. He was a quiet man who avoided any attention, recognition, or glory, but he was always willing to do a favor. He was always the first one to volunteer if the church needed painting or other odd jobs. Every fall he would patch up the worst spots on the roof of the trailer owned by the old man down the street, hoping to get him through one more winter.

But the one thing that I most remember about my father is the nativity stables. One year my mother painted a ceramic nativity scene. My father then built a wooden stable for it. When people came to visit they would comment on the stable and ask where they purchased it. My father ended up building many more stables. People would bring some of their figurines to him and he would build one to scale for them. They were all shocked when they attempted to pay and he would never accept payment, no matter how much they insisted.

We weren't rich. My father worked in a factory and, because it was important to them, my parents struggled to put five kids through Catholic school. I couldn't understand what it would have hurt to accept money for a job well done. Dad was a man of few words, but I'll never forget when he looked at me and said, "If I took money then it would be work." I realized that he wouldn't enjoy making them anymore if he did it for money. The thought of giving something that someone really wanted at no cost made the creating worthwhile. I really believe that we all have stables in us somewhere.

Maybe we can't work with wood, but maybe we are teachers, counselors, or just ears to listen or shoulders to cry on. We all have something to give, expecting nothing in return. As we travel through life, if we are lucky, we will meet a few people to hold up as examples. I was lucky to have one as my father. If you're lucky enough to still have your father around let him know how much you cherish him. Thank him for all the stables he's given you.

By Daniel Roth

## Writing Prompt for April Inklings

The previous six stories were part of the winter writing prompt, "A Christmas Memory." The writing prompt for the April edition of Inklings is, "Springtime Means..." To participate, send your short story, reflection, or poem to deAnn via email by March 19, 2010, droe@lwccyork.com.

Have Fun!

# I Prayed While Eating Chocolate, Today

*In Celebration of the Birth of Elliott James Baldwin, March 2009*

I prayed while  
eating chocolate, today

for a little child.

For his days on this earth  
to be happy. Reaching  
for the hands  
extended to him.

And that his hands  
would open tenderly  
in the same way  
to himself.

My eyes are wet.

I think it is good to pray  
with chocolate.  
To a God who loves you  
and who knows how  
the universe is built.

I think that he  
will protect this child  
from all the fears I have known.

By AJK

# Passion

Recently I spent a few days in Gettysburg with some of the other interns. While I was there I could not help but feel the passion that was evident in the people that fought and died there. On both sides of the war they had this all-encompassing passion that pushed them on through the tough times and the moments of hardship and despair. In the museum there are many letters from the lines, both to their loved ones and from their loved ones. These letters convey their earnest attempts to do what was right and their unbribed desire to see it done. This passion that they had is something that has clearly been lost on this generation. Their lives were ruled by it and everything that they did displayed it for all to see. So what happened? Why after over a hundred years has this reckless passion disappeared? Why are we now ruled by an apathy that is as contagious as the passion that was once held by our forefathers and those in the Civil War?

I think that one of the reasons is that we're afraid of passion. It is frightening and it makes people do crazy things. When you are passionate about something your mind tends to focus on just that and people think you're obsessed or even worse. Once you've tasted passion and seen its effects in your life you can't help but be passionate about everything else. God's stance on passion is pretty obvious as well. On several occasions Jesus says to leave everything and follow Him. He wants your entire focus to be on Him, not to be distracted by the worries of your day or the things that you have or even desire. He says at one point, "you are neither hot nor cold, so I

will spit you out of my mouth.” He doesn't want a lukewarm affection, He wants an unbridled, reckless love.

It is very easy to go through life without experiencing passion for something. It is passion, however, that can alter the entire shape of the world. I went to an event put on by World Vision and while I was there I read about a 4-year-old girl who started a non-profit organization that sends thousands of toys to children in Africa. A 4-year-old with a passion for serving others was able to change the world. Another story is that of the person who at the age of 16 started a movement entitled “Loose Change to Loosen Chains.” He is now collecting money around the world to help free those still under slavery. His passion has altered the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. Can you imagine what this world would be like if each of us was passionate about serving God?

I know that in my life I have been in both places. I can tell from experience that being passionate is not easy. You tend to get burned by it, sometimes its hard and makes life even more difficult. There are times when you just want a break from it as it can be mentally, physically, and emotionally draining. I can tell you also from experience that there is no other way to live life fully than to live passionately for Christ. So don't be afraid to be burned or get hurt; don't be afraid to be thought crazy or a fool; don't back away when things get tough; stand up and passionately live your life for Christ.

By Ryan Johnson

[www.longing4passionatesurrender.blogspot.com/](http://www.longing4passionatesurrender.blogspot.com/)

# My Daughter

My daughter, my best friend...

Oh, how a mother delights in her children. My sons are precious to me; they have grown to be men who treat those around them, and specifically their significant others, with tenderness, love, care, and respect. As a mom you desire this in your heart for them, but until they grow and mature you cannot be sure, you can only do your part in playing a significant role in their lives to guide them toward it. Then, when the time comes that you are able to witness it for yourself, it is a wonderful place to be when your soul experiences who they have become--what you hoped and prayed for.

Then there is the precious relationship that a mother and daughter share--one that I have with my daughter. Though there have been struggles, they have all been worth it in the long run.

From a very young age her heart was tender, her smile was beaming, and her character developing as one who loves from deep within. As a woman she has kept these qualities and blossomed even more into a fun-loving person who makes those around her know that they are important and that she genuinely cares about them. Once again, when you witness this as a mother, it gives you such a joy to treasure.

Our relationship had just about dissolved and until it started to

come back I didn't realize how much grief had been in my heart when the relationship wasn't there. So, a few months ago you could not have told me that I would receive the blessing of rekindling my relationship with her, at least not this soon.

But God used this Christmas break to give me a precious gift--a relationship that is now woman to woman. This came about as a result of many circumstances: sickness, learning to live with five other young ladies, the violation of theft in her home, the tragedy of the death of a good friend, and now the beginning of a new relationship in her life as a woman. All these things have played a key role in bringing us to this place of best friends. As we move forward it is a gift I will always treasure in my heart.

I am not one who is much for making New Year's resolutions, but I do know that I want 2009 to be a better year than 2008. With my daughter as my best friend it is a great place to start!

Anonymous, 2008

# Forgiveness

A little girl stands before me, her face soft and round. I can see the tears brimming in her eyes. She looks so sad as she hands me the remains of a beautiful porcelain doll. “I’m sorry, momma” she whispers. She is easily forgiven.

A young lady stands before me, sadness and regret obvious in her pose as she refuses to look at me. She hands me my car keys and promises me she will never drive again, if I forgive her for denting my car. My heart goes out to my little girl, and I forgive.

A woman stands before God. Tears roll down her face as she lifts up the broken pieces of her life to Him. She dares to whisper, “I’m sorry, Lord” as she prays He will enter her life and forgive her sins. God sees His child, and He forgives.

“For if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

1 John 1:9

By Linda Radzik

## Take Up Your Cross

With each step, the pain in my left knee radiates throughout my entire leg. Over the last few weeks I have sought to ease the pain by changing shoes, wrapping the knee, taking meds, and icing at night. Nothing has worked and today I am really feeling the weariness of my body as a result of the hours of lost sleep my knee has caused. I pray to God, the great physician, to take this pain from me and I hear clearly from Him that He already has ... on the cross. “Father, why does it still hurt then?” “My son, take up your cross.”

The summer has yet to release its grip on the city. The air is moist with the fumes of the countless cars that rush by. The heat radiates from the street and the sidewalk. Under the overpasses there is no relief from the midday sun or the stench of filth, urine, decay, and trash. The air is stagnant, hot, and humid and the streets seem to stick to me. I have walked this walk maybe a hundred times yet today my walk is more an exaggerated limp than a walk. As I approach my destination, I feel the sweat running down my back, underneath the laden backpack. “What is my cross? What am I to bear for You, my Father?”

I approach with a wave of a hand as the residents of this few square feet of the city greet me with various forms of “hello.” I have been here many times before, the last just yesterday. I ease my pack off as our conversation turns to the thunderstorms of the previous night, the losing streak of the Baltimore Orioles, and what they had for their last meal and

## Take Up Your Cross

when. I unpack the items I have brought today, a small fuel stove, plastic tarps and parachute cord, various packaged food items, a pan, and some fresh steaks. I show them the operation of the stove and we put the steaks on for them to soon enjoy. The tarp comes a day late but there will be other storms and the men are so grateful for so little. We talk as the steaks sizzle in the heat, replacing the stifled stench of this place with the smell of cooking meat.

One man shows me a map of the United States that he found in a trash can. He traces with a dirty finger the various states he has lived in, mostly on the streets. He says he moves from place to place with the seasons. He talks of those he has met on the streets of other cities, of other underpasses and fetid places. He speaks of those who pass him on the street with averted glances, of the hunger that never leaves his belly, or the wounds that never seem to heal. He looks to me with pleading eyes and asks why I visit them, why I keep coming back with items and food. I tell him of my walk in grace and that I am there as a response to my growing understanding of God's grace for me. I tell them that I and God love them.

As the steaks near completion, I take my leave and begin my walk back to work, the pain in my knee more intense, having stiffened during my short visit. In my head, thoughts of the map of the U.S., those in other cities who sleep on the streets, the hungry, the sick, the needy, the lost, the forgotten, and the ignored... and the words of my Father, "take up your cross." I retrace my steps to my office to finish my work day

there. Off in the distance I hear the rumble of thunder and notice the darkening clouds rising in the west. It will rain tonight.

By Mike Johnson

## Floozy's Baby

The usual welcome relief of July's evening thunderstorms had eluded us and the soil had suffered under relentless sun for weeks, finally drying and cracking like an old farmer's skin. Even the most tenacious weeds were withered and crisp; the only moisture to be found was in the oppressive air. It was the kind of day that usually kept animals out of the midday heat, seeking out some cool, damp corner inside the weathered barn. Nevertheless, as our car turned into the dusty, rutted drive, a one-dog greeting party came, wagging and barking. The resident barn dog was on duty.

"She looks more like a dancing dust mop than a dog, doesn't she, Mom?" My daughter Ahna laughed. "Hey, Floozy-good dog! Good girl!"

Floozy's licorice-black button eyes peered out of her shaggy little face and a merry grin displayed a length of lolling tongue. She earned her name by greeting each newcomer with an indiscriminate four-legged freestyle hula and subsequent display of taut pink tummy. Floozy loved everybody.

Today, as my teenaged daughter and I returned from our vacation to feed and groom her beloved horse, Twister, we could see that Floozy had acquired an extra shadow; a fluffball of solid black was skittering after her on unsteady legs.

"Look, Mom, that's one of the barn kittens following Floozy," she said as we parked. "Wonder where Mama Cat could be? She's usually so protective; you know she'd never let any dog near her babies."

The last time we'd been here, we saw that, nervous

that her babies were wandering dangerously close to its edge, Mama Cat had finally brought her four little ones down out of the hayloft, making a new bed for them in the straw of a vacant stall. Ahna scooped up this small adventurer and snuggled his little body under her chin.

Just then the caretaker, Gus, emerged from the dimness of the barn, sloshing some of the contents of the water bucket he carried in each hand onto his boots. He spoke around the juicy pocket of Red Man in his cheek.

"Hey," he greeted us succinctly.

"Hi, there, Gus—it's good to see you again." I looked around. "Where are the other cats?" I asked him.

"Welllll..." he drawled. "Mama and the rest musta drunk some antifreeze I spilt last week. Onliest one left is him." He gestured with his stubbled chin towards the tiny black kitten.

"Oh, no-- how awful!" we both said in unison.

"What's this one's name?" Ahna asked sadly.

"Won't last long enough fer that," he mumbled. Gus punctuated this grim prediction with a squirt of tobacco and spit, and then shuffled off to continue his round of chores.

"You poor thing," I said as I took the tiny orphan from my daughter. His sun-warmed black fur tickled my nose as I sniffed in the pleasant scent of fresh hay. His small body felt weightless, as if I cradled a dandelion that was ready to blow away with the first breeze.

"What's going to happen to you, little no-name baby?" I murmured. "Gus is right. You're much too little to be without

a mama. You'll never make it!"

"*Ple-e-ase* can we bring him home with us, Mom?" Ahna begged, taking the kitten back from me and holding him close. "I could feed him with a bottle; we can't just let him die!" she said with a catch in her voice. I hesitated. Ahna was counting on my own strong compulsion to rescue any living creature in need, but in this case I was reluctantly forced to be realistic.

"I'd really love to, Sweetie," I said sadly, "but we can't adopt her. You know how allergic Dad is to cats. It just wouldn't work. Sometimes you just have to let nature take its course."

The kitten watched me, eyes round and alert. His miniature pink mouth opened, mewling pitifully. Lonely and hungry, this baby was calling for his mama, his litter mates, and a good meal. Ahna, tears in her eyes, tried to comfort him, but he squirmed and his cries grew louder and more frantic. At our feet, Floozy began a soft, persistent whining.

Ahna looked down. "What's the matter, Flooze? You want to see this kitten? Okay...here you go." She put the crying kitten down and Floozy licked him and immediately flopped over on her back, baring her belly.

So far as anybody at the farm knew, Floozy was a maiden lady, but though she'd never had puppies, evidently all her instincts were pure mother love. The kitten nuzzled purposefully, found a nipple, closed his eyes and began to suckle, kneading Floozy rhythmically with his tiny paws. The tangle of wet fur was evidence of previous enthusiastic sessions, and,

amazed, we saw that she was swollen with milk. The little dog's flanks heaved with a sigh of contentment as the kitten began to purr with a steady rumble.

Ahna and I exchanged relieved smiles.

“Looks like all our concern was wasted,” I said. “God had a plan for him already!”

A satisfactory, though unorthodox, adoption had taken place, and this little orphan had a mother after all. Now this kitten had gained a name as well: he would always be called Floozy's Baby.

By Linda Landreth Phelps

## Mr. Fix-It

There are key landmarks, turning points, in the ascent of man. There is the harnessing of fire, the discovery of the wheel, the development of written language, the invention of frozen pizza, and the invention of the TV remote controller. Similarly, there are landmarks, key milestones, in our individual lives: becoming potty trained; learning to drive; marriage; our children's arrival; and starting to get mail from AARP. I have a new item to add to this list of milestones, for both humankind and me individually. I have successfully repaired our dryer. Not everyone, I'm sure, will share my conviction that this accomplishment equates with the wheel, or childbirth. But me successfully repairing anything is so out of character that it warrants inclusion on such lists. The odyssey began Thursday morning, when Lori shouted down the stairs, "THE DRYER WON'T TURN ON". It wasn't unplugged, but acted as if it was. It was totally comatose. She checked the breaker box in the basement, but none were tripped. I relegated the announcement to the background, subconscious processing part of my brain, went about other business, and waited for my cerebral cortex to propose a course of action. I fully expected the conclusion would be to call the Maytag Repairman, wake him from his nap, wait two days, watch as he gloomily shook his head and said, "you need a new dryer, sorry, that'll be \$129 please." Unexpected crises, such as this one, seem to arise at the most inconvenient time. Flat tires seem to happen when the trunk is stuffed full of suitcases and it's raining. And dryers fail when there is laundry piled to the ceiling, and there is an oversized load of newly washed wet towels and sweat pants needing to be dried. The

upstairs hallway and our bedroom were transformed into a surreal wonderland of wet wash hanging everywhere it could hang—from the ironing board, from the treadmill, from the bedposts, coat rack, and chairs. I suddenly decided, “I can fix it!” I was probably delirious from the high level of laundry chemicals in the bedroom air, but nonetheless that was my plan. It's important to note, I don't fix stuff. It's not among my skill set. But I rounded up some tools, pulled the dryer away from the wall, and set about figuring out how dryers work, and more specifically, why this one did not. An hour or so later, the dryer's hood was up, like a cubic white Buick, and there were dryer internal organs scattered about the laundry room. I had formed a hypothesis, aided by internet sites like Appliance Repair for Morons, that the trouble was in two things called thermal breakers, and successfully removed them. Friday morning I went to a little store in West York that sells appliance entrails. The man behind the counter peered over his glasses at me with disdain, probably expecting me to say “My dryer don't dry. How come?” But I confidently, and correctly ask for the parts I needed. His demeanor changed, as he apparently mistook me for an authentic member of the Guys Who Fix Stuff fraternity. “Twenty Six bucks, buddy.” That evening, I successfully reinstalled all the organs, and closed the hood. I noticed one leftover screw. A big one. So, the hood came open again, and in short order, I had located the screw's home, installed it, and closed the hood again. The internet education I received on Maytag dryers urged the cleaning of various passages where lint accumulates, and leads to the failure of the very

parts I replaced. So, with the shop vac, I removed enough wads of furry lint to make several cats, and closed her back up. And you know what? It worked! I threw in some damp socks that had been hanging from the laundry room door, pushed the start button and it rumbled to life! All weekend, I made Lori repeat how impressed she was. I told her, probably, five times, we saved a lot of money. And I think she is proud. Or at least surprised. I'm sure she expected I'd put it back together and it would still be comatose, and I would beat the dryer with a sledge hammer until it was scrap metal. I'm not sure how long the radiant glow of successful repairs lasts, or the half-life of the boost to self confidence, but for now anyway, in this one tiny area of life, I'm pleased with myself.

By Jeff S.

To read more from Jeff, go to his blog:

[www.55blahblah.blogspot.com](http://www.55blahblah.blogspot.com)

## Beautiful Fragrance

On one of my early morning walks I was listening to a message on my MP3 player and at the same time I was in conversation with God about what He was speaking to my heart about. As I approached the bottom of my driveway I began to smell an aroma that was extremely pleasing to my senses. The aroma was so wonderful that I continued to take deeper and deeper breaths until I couldn't take in any more. Finally, I exhaled so that I could breathe in this wonderful fragrance again. This delightful scent was some sort of mixture of perfume and flower. I cannot fully describe it, but it was lovely. If I could have captured it and put it in a bottle I would have!! For me, it was the most delightful aroma I have ever smelled. The down side is that it only lasted about two minutes and then faded away.

I began to ponder the verses that I have heard in scripture about the aromas that are pleasing to the Lord. I was imagining that if that aroma was so pleasing to me, how much more pleasing is the aroma that God delights in when his children are being the "fragrance of life" to those around them.

*But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God, the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).*

Have you experienced someone that spreads the fragrance of knowledge of God? How did that impact you? As you read these verses, what do you sense God speaking to you about?

What is your most favorite fragrance? God allows us most wonderful pleasures; one of them is our sense of smell. One of my most favorite smells is that of a rose, hand picked from my father's garden. Can you sit for a moment or two and imagine your most favorite fragrance, then delight in the gift of your senses?

By Celesa Hagen

To read more from Celesa, check out her blog:

[www.reflectionsthatcome.com](http://www.reflectionsthatcome.com)

# To Start Off the New Year, 2010

## *For A New Beginning*

In out-of-the-way places of the heart,  
Where your thoughts never think to wander,  
This beginning has been quietly forming,  
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire,  
Feeling the emptiness growing inside you,  
Noticing how you willed yourself on,  
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety  
And the gray promises that sameness whispered,  
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent,  
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,  
And out you stepped onto new ground,  
Your eyes young again with energy and dream,  
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not yet clear  
You can trust the promise of this opening;  
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning  
That is at one with your life's desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure;  
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk;  
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm,  
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.




*By John O'Donohue, Celtic writer and poet.  
This excerpt is from his book, "To Bless the Space Between Us."*

## The Writers' Corner ~




tips and other tidbits to help us be better writers...

### THE SIDEWALK NEEDS SHOVELED

It's that most wonderful time of the year—time for bad weather and bad grammar. Did you happen to see anything wrong with the title of this article? If not, you have most likely fallen into the York County (and possibly further reaches of Pennsylvania) habit of neglecting the helping verb. The title should read, “The Sidewalk Needs to be Shoveled.” Here are some other egregious examples I have seen/heard/found:

-  *The dog needs let out.*
-  *This room needs cleaned.*
-  *Our hearts need mended, healed, and renewed.*

When the word “need” is followed by a verb you must throw in a few little helpers—namely, the words “to be.” It's perfectly acceptable to say, “I need a candy bar” or “We need directions to their new house” (because in these cases “need” is not followed by a verb). But, the sentences above need to be rewritten to read:




-  *The dog needs to be let out.*
-  *This room needs to be cleaned.*
-  *Our hearts need to be mended, healed, and renewed.*

Another grammar issue that seems to give people fits is when to use the words “I” or “me” in a sentence. Is it, “This is just between you and I” or “This is just between you and me”? Think of it this way, the word “I” is used when the You in question is the subject of a sentence. “I” does things. “I like that,” you say. You don’t say, “Me like that,” unless you are Tarzan. “Me” makes an appearance when things are done to You: “She gave me a picture of her cat.”

This concept is relatively easy until we combine with others. That’s when the problems really start. “You and me are going sledding when it snows again,” is not good grammar. Take the sentence apart: *You are going sledding + I am going sledding = You and I are going sledding*. Likewise, “If you want to hear about the new movie ask John or I about it,” is also incorrect. Again, take the sentence apart: *Ask John about it + Ask ME about it = Ask John or me about it*.

I think we have room for one more grammar question (aren’t you glad?) that causes untold frustration for many writers (and speakers): The great “affect” vs. “effect” debate. When is it appropriate to use which one? The word “affect” is USUALLY used as a verb (remember, with the

English language we can't say ALWAYS in reference to grammar and punctuation rules—unless we're saying there's ALWAYS an exception to every rule). The word “effect” is USUALLY used as a noun. So, remember this cute little sentence and you'll be right 95% of the time: “I can affect the effect.” Think of “effect” as the result and “affect” as producing or acting upon. Here are some examples:

-  *The cold weather affected him in strange ways.*
-  *The effect of not studying is sure to affect your grade in the class.*
-  *The content of the movie is less important than its effect.*

Make sense? Good. Now get out there—the sidewalk needs to be shoveled so my children and I won't be affected adversely by the effects of York County's latest snowfall. (Now if I could only get out for more milk, bread, and toilet paper...)

By Lisa Long—our resident editor and writing guru.