

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 16

WHEN HAVE YOU FELT COMFORTED BY GOD?

*Oh ye beneath life's crushing load
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps, and slow*

*Take heart for comfort, love and hope
come swiftly on the wing.*

*Oh rest beside the weary road
and hear the angels sing.*

From "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear,"
poem by Edmund Hamilton Sears (1849)

Young Friend's Story

God Heard My Prayer

A few years ago, my sister, my mom, my cat and I were driving back from my grandparents' house in the country. They live about an hour away from our house in the city. Right before we left, in the late afternoon, it started to snow.

As we drove, the weather got worse and worse. The snow was falling harder and the roads were covered with ice. We were all nervous in the car and my mom was driving really carefully and slowly.

We finally got to an intersection of a road that would take us up to the freeway. We sat in the car in the same place for a long time. None of the cars around us were moving. We couldn't go anywhere! Then we heard on the radio that the freeway where we were was closed and the hill on the way back to my grandparents' house was also closed. My mom didn't know what to do—we were stuck between cars. We had been sitting there for an hour already.

I whispered a prayer to God that we would be able to turn around and go back. Right after I prayed, the car in front of us moved

forward a little bit so there was enough room and a tiny bit of time for my mom to turn our car around. We were really happy and excited that we could finally go. I felt like God was really really close to me and had listened to my prayer so I kept praying that we would be safe.

As we slowly drove back the way we had come, my mom was looking for somewhere to stay but there weren't any hotels nearby. She was really nervous. She kept driving back toward my grandparents' house hoping we would make it. We prayed the whole time. There were cars stuck all along the road in the snow and ice, but our car was fine. We listened to the radio and heard that the hill to their house had just been reopened. We were really relieved.


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MINDING THE LIGHT is a bimonthly collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. Among Quakers, "minding the Light" means noticing, listening for and paying heed to the voice of our Teacher.

Early Quakers kept journals about their relationship with God to share with the community. A well-known example is John Woolman's journal, which has been continually in print for more than 200 years. Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is in everyone and that God speaks to everyone, giving us all stories to tell. We hope to carry on the tradition of sharing stories about minding the Light by publishing them for our community and making them available to others on the web.

Each issue is organized around a query about minding the Light. Our writers speak from their own experience, not going beyond the measure of Light they've been given. We hope these stories will transform our way of seeing God and each other and that they will bring comfort to those who seek news of God's presence in the world.

My mom still drove slowly and carefully until we finally made it back to my grandparents' house. We had been in the car for seven hours! I felt a lot of comfort from God on that car ride and I will never forget that feeling if I live to be 100 years old! 

– Oliver M, age 9


The Last Time I Saw My Father

My father had been a troubled man. As a nineteen year old Marine in Korea, he had participated in the landing at Inchon, and the breakout and retreat from the "Frozen Chosin" reservoir. He was deeply scarred by these experiences, and very seldom mentioned what he had experienced there.

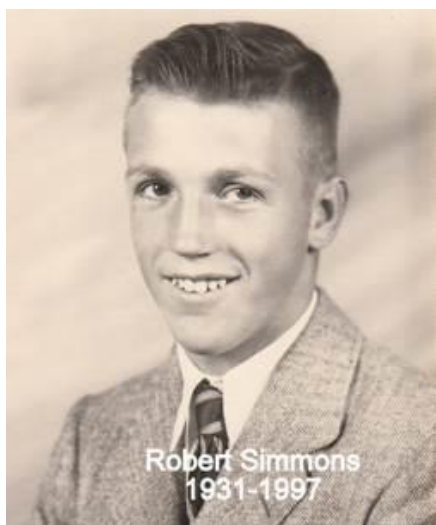
Although he worked with the VA to find relief for what we now call post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), he found no relief. In the end, alcohol was his cushion and crutch. Alcoholism is a terrible burden, both to the alcoholic and to everyone in their life. I was shocked and saddened to hear of his passing, but I also felt relief that his struggles were now over. I was relieved for myself that there would be no more worrying about getting a "There's been an auto accident" phone call in the middle of the night.

My father and I were close and had much in common. I was the oldest child, and had followed him into the same pipefitters trade. Indeed, we had worked together on the same construction projects for several years. It was never easy, but I was able to

know my father in ways that no one else in my family was able to. I believe that his passing affected me as much as anyone. I recall that the day we learned of his death, I was emotionally fraught and tender all day, even though I didn't get the news until later in the day. How can you ever really be prepared to lose a parent?

About two weeks later, I had an unusually vivid dream. I dreamed that I was looking into my father's face. No words were spoken, but I was struck by his amazingly bright hazel and clear eyes. His eyes were so clear and bright with optimism and peace in a way that I had never seen before. I have found great relief and comfort in the experience of his ability to see with beautifully clear eyes. I consider it to be a divine gift which has stayed with me for many years. 

– Joel B. Simmons



"Truly, it is in the darkness that one finds the light, so when we are in sorrow, then this light is nearest of all to us."
Meister Eckhart

A Visit from the Divine

The story that springs to mind when I'm asked, "When have you been comforted by God?" seems to need to be told backwards.

Quite a while ago at a Yearly Meeting session, I passed the table of a woman I considered to be an elder of the Yearly Meeting. We got into a brief discussion, and in my un-questioning way, I announced my certainty of the presence of the divine. She stopped my babbling and asked me very seriously, "How do you know God exists?"


The question stopped me in my tracks. I don't think anyone had asked me that before.

After a moment, I told her this story.

I spent a semester at Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat center on the East Coast. I had lost joy in my life, and I was there to try to find it again, or at least to put the knowledge of joy back into my life. I was taking a class where we were required to read George Fox's Journal, so I went to the lovely long couch in the library, propped myself up lengthwise, and slowly began to absorb what George Fox said with so many words. As I sat there, not engaged in my reading, not quite asleep, not yet dropping the heavy book, I felt a hand on my right shoulder and was surrounded by the love of the divine.

It was such a powerful moment that all it took was the sensation

of a hand and the feeling/knowledge of being completely loved and much-comforted before I went back to slogging my way through George Fox's Journal.

This story of comfort in time of need came to me again in response to the query, "When have you felt comforted by God?" 

– Dorothy F. Day

Next Query for Young Friends

We encourage the participation of young Friends (of any age), so please consider asking a child in your life whether this query makes them think of a story. If it does, consider helping the child tell their story in words or images, or ask us for a Story Catcher.

Query for Young Friends (or older Friends who prefer this query):

Has music ever helped you feel close to God?

Story Deadline: 2/23/14

If all the tenderness in this world could reflect from my eyes, would you accept that love?

If all the forgiveness the heavens have known could be offered from one face, would you accept that divine pardon?

In His sublime sanity every moment God offers that to us: anything that might comfort.

St Francis of Assisi

Windows


After the surgery my view from the hospital bed was of the shadowy tops of trees and the dark night sky. The moon was full, adding light to the darkness, though I never saw the full round beauty of it shining in.

I woke up every hour that night. The sky changed with bright stars, wisps of clouds, rolling clouds, changing constellations.

At midnight, I woke and slowly realized that it wasn't pain that woke me this time. Then, again, I felt a sensation of care and concern that came to me as though the window were open and I could feel the wind and rain. I thought someone must be praying for me just then, and I was so grateful as I fell back asleep.

At 1 a.m., I woke again, registering first on the pain which was there but not any worse. Then again, I felt that great sense of care and concern rolling in like the clouds outside the window. It was so lovely. I basked in it. I didn't move. I just let it come to me until I slept again.

I woke again at 2 a.m. and 3 a.m., and each time this great loving care came in like the changing night sky, bright like the stars and soft like wisps of fog and cloud. It was the most healing sensation – invisible yet palpable. I knew I was feeling something that was always right here but in my busyness and daily attentions, I had not understood.

Somehow, in my post-operation vulnerability, a window had opened for me, and I was blessed in the night. 

– Peg Edera

My Light Babies

I am a proud mother of two beautiful children, a graduate of higher education, and an experienced professional. I have a successful career as a Speech Language Pathologist and I own my own business, but I also have a traumatic past. In spite of my immense progress, growth, and successes, way down in the abyss that is my deepest being, the shadows still exist and more often than I like, they come out to haunt me. But I continue to find light in unexpected ways – most recently through my children.

My daughter Taylor is a spitfire ball of energy ready to combust at any given moment. And she radiates with light. Recently I have begun a different part of my healing journey in which I find myself FEELING emotions about my childhood experiences that I have not felt before. My history is no longer just a series of stories and events to be recalled and told without emotion as if they never happened to ME. Lately these feelings manifest in the form of tears. Just this week, Taylor caught me in one of these moments. Immediately her voice and facial expressions changed to show concerns as she asked "Mom, what's wrong? Why are you crying?" Not wanting to burden her, I initially said very little. She begged, "Please tell me. I can handle it. I promise," followed by, "You're going to be okay," as she gently stroked my arm. After I explained in very simple terms that I had a hard childhood she said, "You're a great mom. You don't have to worry anymore. I'll hold you." And she did.

My son Morgan radiates light in a different way. He has been the key to unlocking my power to live again and he has given me the freedom to feel. With Morgan's birth, I experienced an immediate rush of peace and rest. Suddenly a series of burdens were lifted from me — fear, doubt, and sadness, all propelled away. Every day as I watch Morgan grow, I am reminded of the good in life. In these moments, I am no longer plagued with uncertainty, fear, and doubt. I see that happiness and joy exist and I am free to pursue them. When I look at my son and he smiles back at me, laughs, or crawls over to me, I know that life is good. My past filled with fears and insecurity slips away. The voices in my head that tell me everything's wrong cease. And in those moments, I stand firm, centered in who I am as a person — family member, professional, friend. In those moments, I find peace. 🔥

— Sarah Blanchard

Difficult Tasks and Weighty Responsibilities

In 2009 I was fired from an organization I had served for eleven years — working my way up to Vice President. Part of me was angry, indignant, and ready to fight. That isn't the story though. Those are mundane human emotions, not particularly interesting. But, how I was held — bathed, rather — in the light through this tough time is a much better story.

A week before I was fired my boss confronted me with her belief that I had damaged our organization. She sent me home and told me when I returned on Monday to bring her a letter sharing what I had done wrong and how I would improve.

This was pretty devastating to my Type-A personality, but the beauty of this story is that it never was my agenda; it was always God's plan. Because there is a universal intelligence with plans way ahead of my own, we had scheduled a visit to a nearby abbey that weekend. There, I cried, I prayed, and I kept asking my husband, "How do I write this letter?"

But I knew how — forget explanation or justification; instead offer your honesty. The letter I ended up writing was truly the Light in me pouring out onto paper. I shared what was in my heart, and although writing a letter to defend accusations that were unfounded seemed punitive, the process I went through to write it was healing. In the letter was a line that promised I would strive to do my best in the future even in the midst of difficult tasks and weighty responsibilities. I borrowed it from an oath in Scouting. At the time I didn't know what an important part of my life Scouting would become, but the line resonated then and does even more so today.

A week later I was called into another meeting and fired. My boss explained that when she read my letter, although she didn't doubt my sincerity, my

line about striving to do my best even in the midst of challenging tasks and weighty responsibilities confirmed for her that I was no longer dedicated to our organization. As I look back on that meeting, and how calm I felt — as she shut the door on eleven years of my hard work — I recognize how I was held through that day and the days that followed.

Feeling a little shocked, I called my husband and gave him the news. Later that night when I shared what my boss had said about the scouting line, it was as if all the windows were suddenly thrown open and the Light poured in. Instantly Stephen said, "You were fired because of a line from the Scout Oath — Kaleen, this is fantastic! How often in our lifetimes do we get a sign of God so clearly at work? Tonight we should open our best bottle of wine and celebrate how easy this transition was made for you." And we did!

For me, what was so remarkable about this experience was how apparent God's activity was in my life through a time that felt miserable and scary, and the beautiful way he softened and opened me through struggle and loss to prepare me to receive greater future blessings than I could ever imagine. 🔥

— Kaleen Deatherage

How did the rose ever open its heart and give to this world all its beauty? It felt the encouragement of light against its being, otherwise, we all remain too frightened.
Hafiz (14th C poet)

Birds Like Arrows

A beautiful summer Saturday, I was nine years old. I faced a pile of ironing, high as my waist—punishment for some misdeed. I’ve forgotten what it was, or why I had done it, only that atonement waited in laundry piles: in washing, folding, and ironing.

I waited until afternoon. Then, in a panic to finish before the grownups came home, I crammed all the clothes into one wash load, even my wool school skirt, which shrank into a tutu.

As usual on Saturday, I was home alone. My mother worked late in a beauty shop, setting nice church ladies’ hair in thousands of poodle curls, backcombing prom queens’ up-dos. At night, I would rub her feet: knobby from too much standing in high heels.

I wanted to iron everything perfectly to make up for ruining my school skirt, but I didn’t know how to iron my stepfather’s blue work shirts. In my smallish hands, the iron weighed like a steamship, and the white plastic buttons were crushed like icebergs. I melted the edges of a few. I didn’t know how to iron work pants either—how to press the long creases and flatten the pocket flaps.


So, dreamer that I was, I sang all the songs I knew, and waited for the birds to sing to me. To me, birds were arrows from God with comfort and messages.

There was the mourning dove. She perched in the peach tree, right outside my window. So sadly kind and wise, her song

increased with the lengthening shadows. She understood everything.

There was the mockingbird. He lived like a hobo. He had no special tree, nor a song of his own. He imitated my cat, the ice cream truck, and our telephone ringing. He made me laugh.

Finally, there was the hummingbird. I never learned where she lived. Maybe she flew straight from heaven, sparking across the garden like a shooting star. Her wings whirred hope. As she disappeared to sip the flowers, I entered this hope and drank up love.

I set the iron down to listen closer, leaned into my dreams, and burnt a brown triangle on my stepfather’s shirt. Lucky for me, God sent the comforting birds again the next Saturday, and the next—to accompany my crimes and punishments. 
— Claire Nail

Light Brigade*

Sally Gillette, Clerk
Mike Huber, Recording Clerk
Carol Bosworth
Peg Edera
Pat Matthews
Julie Peyton
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This paper is 100%
Post-Consumer Recycled

Living in Jersey

In 1985, I moved from Oregon to New Jersey. I found myself halfway between Philadelphia and New York City. New Jersey challenged all my assumptions about pizza, recycling and customer service. The people were more aggressive. Wild spaces were harder to find.

Despite the significant cultural differences, I was grateful for the opportunity to live in New Jersey. Being in graduate school felt like a privilege. On my drive to campus, I passed a giant oak tree (named for the Revolutionary War general who died beneath its branches), a Quaker meetinghouse (built in 1760), and Albert Einstein’s house.

My body was less enthusiastic about the new environment. After moving to New Jersey, I got sick more often. A couple of times, I completely blacked out. Nothing like that had ever happened to me before.


From the Jersey Turnpike, you can see enormous oil refineries and chemical plants. We lived near an old canal, connecting the Delaware and Raritan Rivers. Nearby signs warned of contaminants in the water. More than once, we heard stories about raw sewage and medical waste washing ashore along the beach. I started to worry that all the pollution was taking a toll on my health.

That first year in New Jersey, I caught the flu. I’d never felt so miserable. I was 3000 miles from home, and I was too weak to stand. Because I was already

worried about my health, I was afraid that my symptoms might indicate something more sinister than influenza. I expressed my fears in spontaneous prayer: "God, please don't let me die in New Jersey."

For reasons I can't explain, God answered my prayer with very specific reassurance: "You won't die in New Jersey." At least in my experience, this level of specificity is exceedingly rare. In my prayerful conversations, God is far more likely to say, "Don't worry" or "I will be with you" than to make unequivocal promises. But I felt confident that death wouldn't find me in New Jersey.

I took great comfort in this promise. So far, God has been faithful. I've never died in New Jersey.

I've told this story a few times. People inevitably ask, "If you moved to New Jersey, would you live forever?" From a tactical perspective, I understand the question. At the same time, this question strikes me as a way of diminishing the gift I received. During a time when I felt scared and alone, God offered me some very clear reassurance. That gift of comfort was precious; I don't need to make it something more. I certainly don't want God to regret speaking so plainly. I don't want my communication with God to sound like the service agreement on iTunes. 
 – Mike Huber

*They can be like the sun, words.
 They can do for the heart
 what light can for a field.
 St John of the Cross*

Publication Guidelines

The Journal is a forum for sharing experiences of the Light. Thus, we distinguish between a story ("this is what happened to me") and an interpretation ("this is what my experience means"). We urge writers to keep the level of interpretation to a minimum, allowing each story to touch the reader as a work of art, rather than as a philosophical or theological argument.

Stories and other written responses must be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attendee of West Hills Friends. Written responses should be submitted in text format in the body of an email.

Original paintings, photos, and other art can be submitted on paper or emailed in JPG format. Original music and videos should be submitted as links to safe websites such YouTube or Vimeo.

More information at:
www.mindingthelight.org

Conundrum

I'd like to say that we followed the Light into the wilderness. In reality we headed off into the mountains unprepared and the Light accompanied us, knowing we would need divine intervention.

Years ago my husband and I decided to take our teenage daughters on a hike over the continental divide in Colorado (12,000-plus elevation). The payoff, we knew from past experience, was a natural hot

springs set at 11,000 ft. high above the clouds: an ineffable experience. Knowledgeable hikers encouraged us to try a new ascension route requiring two days to get to Conundrum (the springs), but allowing us to embark from a trailhead hours closer to us.

After gathering all of the necessary supplies, packing and unpacking to lighten our monster packs, we were driven to the trailhead, ten miles from the closest signs of humanity. Empowered by a sense of adventure and a certain amount of confidence which occluded our true naiveté and inexperience, we set off.


That first day we hiked until dusk, with blue skies morphing into mist and drizzle and the tree line left behind. At around 9,000 feet we set camp beside a mountain tarn, finding old pieces of a crashed plane to protect our meager fire from the mountain winds. Cold, wet, and tired, our tent became a welcoming sanctuary within which the four of us managed to find a measure of warmth and comfort. The second day began with more inclement weather, but our spirits were bolstered by the promise of a blissful soak in 102 degree water.

Approaching the higher altitudes around noon the next day, a well-worn path gave way to a boulder-strewn field covering the next quarter mile. Avalanches from the previous winter had obliterated any semblance of trail. For miles around we could only see mountain peaks, steep escarpments and now a leg-breaking/crushing boulder field.

With the understanding that injured limbs posed disturbing ramifications for all involved, we gingerly and prayerfully began the arduous trek over 3- to 6-foot rocks.

Three hours later, with that particular scare behind us, we still could find no semblance of a path, signs of humanity, of life, a campfire, any clue as to where we were or where we should go. Trudging along with lungs gasping for oxygen, my confidence and faith appeared as bedraggled as the rest of me.

Just as the sun descended behind a high ridge, we dropped into a valley of greenery beyond which we spied steam rising in the distance – and the path for which we had so desperately searched. Temperatures had already plummeted into the 40s by the time we dragged our weary bodies into the hot alpine pool.

Were it not for an old forestry shack 80 yards from the springs, hypothermia would have become our reality that night. The doorless structure kept us from getting completely soaked by the continuous rain, and we awoke to the comforting magic of sunshine. Buoyed by warmth, food, and a sense of God’s protection and grace, we were then able to hike the 12 miles back to civilization. Our little group survived cold, discouragement, fear, panic, and harsh mountain weather. Despite ourselves, we were protected, guided, provided for and comforted by an almighty Presence. *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* 
– ASW

Nothing Changed But Everything Was Different

About halfway through my undergraduate program I hit a snag. In order to proceed with the normal sequence of chemistry classes for my major I needed to have taken or be concurrently enrolled in general physics. But I hadn’t started the physics sequence, and the first class in that sequence wasn’t going to be offered in the coming term. The upshot of this series of falling dominoes was that I was going to fall behind and it would take me an extra year to graduate.

This would likely be rotten news for anyone, but in my imagined future I would be enrolling in medical school, followed by internship and residency. All those years of graduate education and training loomed large, and an additional year of time-wasting undergraduate work was dauntingly depressing.

I left the building where I was supposed to have finished signing up for winter-term classes with an empty schedule; nothing had fit, no class that I needed and was qualified to take was open. My parents were 2000 miles away, and my Dad was going through chemotherapy.


At the street corner waiting for the light to turn green I was about as glum as I had ever been; not weepingly sad, just weighted down with gloomy resignation. Then I heard The Voice.

It said, “If I want you to go to medical school, do you think there is anything that can get in your way?”

“Well, no; probably not.”

“If I don’t want you to go to medical school, do you think you’d be happy once you got there?”

“Well, no; I wouldn’t want that.”

The light turned green, and I crossed the street. The miracle was not that my schedule suddenly made sense or the classes miraculously opened up or that my Dad’s brain tumor was gone, but that my despair was turned into joy because of a conversation with the One I call God. Nothing *external* had changed but I finished the journey back to my dorm happy. How can I explain that? How can I justify that? 
– Julie Peyton

Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.

Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD's hand double for all her sins.

The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain

And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

Isaiah 40, 1:5 (KJV)

Hope for a Distant Future

My childhood encompassed a special kind of chaos. I lived in a tiny one-bedroom house with my family in Central California. I slept in a crib in my parents' room until after turning six, when my grandmother's Alzheimer's disease progressed far beyond a manageable state and she was finally placed in a nursing home. Then I relocated to her "hallway suite". Our house was filthy and poorly cared for. Our front porch fell down bit by bit throughout my childhood, until my brother finally ripped the last few boards down so they wouldn't fall onto us. We consistently had a variety of random critters including kittens, spiders, cockroaches, ants, and mice.

In comparison to our emotional state, the environment was heaven. Dad consumed himself with work, money, and housework. Mother struggled to care for herself, her mother-in-law and kids. She suffered from undiagnosed and untreated depression. Dad threatened to kill himself often, sometimes gambling our lives in the process. When I was four, I recall pounding on the bathroom door crying and begging him to put his knife down and come out because I needed him. Later, the car became his preferred weapon. In anger, he'd threaten to wrap it around a pole. He'd peel out of the driveway and speed out into the darkness. Other times, he sped like a maniac with us in the car, weaving in and out of traffic as we feared our immediate doom.


This usually happened on our way to or from church in response to mundane issues like sibling rivalry over potato chips.

I could tell many stories about childhood; eighteen years of stories. Stories that shaped me in every way possible. Stories of existence and survival. But most of all stories of comfort and hope – filled with the exact amount of Light that I needed in any given moment.

My childhood was unstable and traumatic – emotionally, mentally, and physically. I had no sense of privacy, safety, or trust in my own value as someone who others should love. But I had hope. And in spite of a few "random" thoughts of stabbing myself in the stomach with a knife while doing the dishes, I had a reason to live.

I cannot explain, in words, the powerful force that was my faith – the joy and comfort it brought, or the peace. I felt love because every time my daddy left in his car, and I locked myself in his room with the lights off to cry and pray for his safe return, the calming blanket of love and peace washed over me. Every time. When I felt worthless, crying and praying at the altars of our church, that same peaceful loving blanket covered me, enveloping my soul, yearning to make me whole.

I found hope and peace repeatedly through prayer and meditation on the light and love of a God some might call a Phantom, who walked with me through 18 years of instability, chaos, emotional turmoil, stress,

and fear. This God who I now call "Light" held my hand and led me through to another life full of hope and promise that I am still learning to embrace. 

– Sarah Blanchard

Query for Chapter 16

Our next Query: "When have you encountered the Light through music? Please share a story from your experience.

Your stories can be submitted in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

Story Deadline: 2/23/14

Subscriptions /Donations

Your subscription is free if you're a member or attender of West Hills Friends. Otherwise, subscriptions are \$20 per year.

To receive Minding the Light by mail (or to have it sent to someone as a gift), send your check or money order to West Hills Friends, P.O. Box 19173, Portland, Oregon, 97219, with "Subscription to Minding the Light" on the memo line. Or inquire at mindingthelight@gmail.com.

Contributions to Minding the Light for printing and mailing costs are much appreciated. Your tax-deductible donation may be sent to:

West Hills Friends
P.O. Box 19173
Portland, Oregon, 97219

Checks should indicate on the memo line that the donation is for Minding the Light.

Release to the Captives

My son's behavior was making me unbearably anxious, and I prayed almost without ceasing. It was hard for me to focus at work and sleep at night.

It was January 1997. Jesse had been paralyzed from the chest down two years earlier by a self-inflicted gunshot wound. We had been devastated, but I had faith that God would heal him if he received all the help he needed. To that end, we used every resource that church and society had to offer. We'd been in family therapy for over two years. Jesse saw a psychologist weekly for individual therapy, and a psychiatrist monthly, for medication. He was in the church youth group, on a wheelchair-sports team, and in an independence training program with several other disabled young people.

That week, Jesse's therapist told me he was afraid that Jesse would kill himself but didn't know what to do. I didn't either. We were helpless.

Two days before Jesse's second suicide attempt, a dream brought me comfort and hope.

I was in a small, simple bedroom in a retreat center that overlooked a



valley surrounded by beautiful mountains. A religious publication was lying on a wooden dresser beneath the window. I leafed through it and was surprised to see large blank spaces on some of the pages.

I felt led to write something in an empty space, so I took the publication to the bed, lay down on my stomach facing the window, and started to write. I didn't know until I wrote the words what I would say.

The first line I wrote was: "I saw the sun come shining", and the next, "from the west down to the east. . . ." As I realized what I was writing, I was filled with a powerful sense of meaning that brought tears. "I saw the sun come shining. . . . We shall be released."

As I wrote these words, a vision appeared where the ceiling had been. The sky opened, the sun shone with incredible brightness. There was beautiful music – someone singing the refrain to Dylan's song, "I Shall Be Released" with altered words. Dylan's words are, "I saw my light come shining, from the west down to the east. Any day now, any day now, I shall be released." These words were, "I saw the sun come shining, from the west down to the east. I saw the sun come shining, we shall be released."

I covered my face with my hands and sobbed with grief, joy and a powerful sense of meaning. An image arose of someone imprisoned in a nice room. I realized they couldn't be happy because God didn't intend for people to live this way. I was still sobbing as the dream ended.

Despite the immense sadness in the dream, I was comforted by the powerful sense of meaning I felt and the hopeful promises I saw in the imagery – that there was a place for my writing in a religious publication and that, through writing, I would find deep meaning.

Recently, it struck me that the promises I saw in this dream are being fulfilled. *Minding the Light* is a religious publication with a place for my stories, and writing them has been healing and deeply meaningful. 🔥

– Sally Gillette

"When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He has anointed Me
To bring good news to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the
brokenhearted,
To proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty
those who are oppressed;
To proclaim the
year of the Lord's favor.*

And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
Luke 4:18-21