A Touch of Love

2000.
A life lived and a story written by

Tom Wells
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This book was written to my first grandchild, Noah. When I speak of my wife, Judie, I refer to her as “Nana”, because that’s what Noah calls her. I refer to my son, Tom, as “your dad”.

We have worked on this book for almost one year. When I began, Noah was a year and a half old and our only grandchild. This book was presented to him and his parents as an Easter present in April, 2000, knowing that another grandchild was on the way.

If this book is ever published, all proceeds will go to the Kristine Marie Wells Scholarship Fund and will help provide support for those who want to become teachers.

All praise and glory to our Heavenly Father.

Tom Wells
TO BEGIN WITH

Matthew 11:28 “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Noah, if I am alive when you read this for the first time, we will have a lot of new things to talk about, but that is not why I am writing this story. I am writing this to you and all my future grandchildren because I believe it is very important to acknowledge and thank God for all His countless touches of love (Grace) that have, one by one, shaped me into who I am. When you are five or six, I will be 58 or 59, and that is when you will begin to form your memories of me. I want you to know that I haven’t become the person you will remember overnight or by myself. As you grow older, the touch of love will begin molding you. I pray that, through these words and your time with Nana and me, we will become a touch of love to you.

These chapters are intended to be similar to building blocks that make up a magnificent Cathedral. Like our lives, a Cathedral takes shape one block at a time to form the foundation, the walls, the roof, and the spires. These building blocks can be compared to the joys, the pains, the sorrows, and the unplanned (at least by us) events that take place in our lives and shape who we become. As our lives are touched, we are changed, much like the building process that allows plain stone to become a thing of beauty --- a tribute to God --- a magnificent Cathedral. (I’m not beautiful or magnificent, but I hope one day to be a tribute!)

Let me try to say the same thing another way (Nana says I do that all the time). People build Cathedrals; God builds people, with and through His Grace. I have come to know that each time we receive this Grace, we are touched by love. This story is not about Nana or me, it’s all about how Grace, a touch of love, has shaped us into what He wants us to be for Him and others --- including you. God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit are the master potters. As we are spun around on this wheel of life, we must allow them, through their touches, to mold us into the masterpiece that only they can see and create.

Noah, never forget that the touch of love is free, because the Giver prepaid for it on a cross. The touch can be received anywhere and be delivered by anyone. Please be available to give and receive.

When you finish this story, I pray that you too will come to know that all you know can, by a touch of love, change all you know.

Amen.
I Timothy 1:14  “The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.”

We have all been touched by love. No one, anywhere, no matter how isolated he or she tries to be, can escape a touch of love. If you think not, then name someone who has not enjoyed the warmth of the sun, the cleansing of a gentle rain or the beauty of a simple flower? These are all touches of love from our loving Father in Heaven. Most of us have been touched in very special ways, and sometimes it’s almost impossible to recognize these touches for the Grace they offer. Grace can be well hidden or disguised from both our minds and hearts. Think about it. How would you define:

?? Your faith in God
?? Your belief in Jesus Christ as your Savior
?? Christ’s gift of the Holy Spirit
?? A loving, understanding, supportive, willing, and grateful spouse (like Nana)
?? The very special blessing of children
?? The very special blessing of grandchildren
?? Real and supporting friendships that are always there for you
?? An inspiring pastor and an accepting and welcoming church family

The list of our individual, intimate, and special touches goes on forever. The only thing that limits our ability to list them all is our inability to recognize or remember them as a touch.

Once we have received these touches of love, lived with them, learned from them, and are changed because of them, we learn to enjoy the repeated pleasure that comes from reliving them through memories and sharing them
with others. As we reach out and touch others, no matter how hard it may be, we are touched again.
Noah, Grace had been a difficult concept for me to recognize and accept. I have always enjoyed giving and felt uncomfortable receiving, even Grace. Now that I know what Grace is, I have learned to accept it. I also have to fight hard each day to not take Grace for granted.

_II Corinthians 8:1 “We want you to know about the grace of God which has been shown.”_

As I write this, I am praying that my experiences with the countless touches that Grace has placed upon my life will help you to recognize Grace. The sooner you do, the sooner you can begin thanking your Father in Heaven (something Pops doesn’t do often enough for His touch). It will also break my heart if you don’t share the Grace you receive with others. Noah, one note of caution: please don’t ever rely on Grace to save you from your own stupidity.

I am writing this because I want you to know mine is a life lived because of Grace, and I may not be around to tell you these stories. Now that’s not all together true; I probably couldn’t tell some of them to you because your Pops cries easy, and he can’t talk and cry at the same time. (I have never thought that crying makes you less of a man.) I want you to learn from the touches I’ve been blessed with, not about me, but about Grace lived first hand. Because I don’t know scripture well enough to explain Grace to you, I’ll try with these stories to explain that “all I know is that the touch of love has changed all I know”.
Chapter 1:

JOHN CLINE

II Corinthians 12:9  “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

I have learned over the last 55 years, who and what I am and am not. Because of yet another of those countless touches, I am thankful for what I am and have, rather than regretting and worrying about that which I am not or do not have; I sure didn't start my life that way. When your dad shows you home movies of me as a child you'll see that I was not a good-looking child. Perhaps that's why I tried to find things, mostly the wrong ones, to draw attention to me, rather than to my homeliness. Noah, I want you to know that I am not proud of a lot of what I did, and I sure don't want you to think that because I lived through these mistakes, you can be stupid and selfish like I was and live through them too. Remember when I said, “Don't rely on Grace to save you from your own stupidity.” People in wheel chairs, cemeteries, and with broken hearts have had to learn that the hard way. Jesus told us not to tempt the Lord thy God, but, thank God, He also promised to be there to forgive and comfort us (in His way) when we do.

I don't plan on telling you every rotten thing I've done. Being arrested, stealing, lying, and cheating are not things you necessarily want your grandson to know about, but they are the stones that shaped me and, by a touch of love, didn't drag me down.

When I was 12 or 13, I grew nine inches in less than a year. I was 6'5” and weighed less than 155 pounds. I was so thin and uncoordinated that, when I turned sideways and stuck out my tongue, I looked like a zipper trying to stand up. To make matters worse, I had “buck-teeth” so bad I could eat corn on the cob through a chain link fence without touching the wire.

School wasn’t easy for me in the beginning. If I were in school now, I would most likely be in a learning disability class. I was such a slow reader that I was embarrassed when called upon to read out loud in front of the class. I hated that it took me so much longer than everyone else to get my reading work done, so I looked for and found a way around that problem. Soon I developed other means of getting my schoolwork done: I faked my way through. Cheating and lying went hand in hand with the faking and, when they failed, I used my trusty stand-by . . . “brown nosing.”
That was true for all of my classes, except math, which came naturally to me; I was always number one in my math class, go figure!

For the most part, rather than just doing the work, I worked harder at trying to figure out how not to do it. Like most children that age, I was looking for attention. My problem was I was looking in all the wrong places.

My father died when I was 28. Regrettably, I was still too young and partially blinded by self to realize just how much he loved my mother, brother, sister, and me. He, just like Jesus, didn't love me for the thanks or because he wanted something in return. It's a good thing he didn't, because when it came to the thanks and gratitude grades, I would have received an F... failing big time. In my teen years, he must have been awfully disappointed in me, but I can't remember him ever showing it. My way of thanking him and my mother for all their touches of love was to steal their money and lie to them about almost everything.

At age 14, I started lifting weights at our local YMCA, where I met John Cline, an unpaid volunteer. He saw through what I was trying to be and, like my Father in Heaven and my dad, he saw what I could become. For the next three years, John gave me and my best friend, Tom Fuggett, large doses of tough love and touches, while he taught us how to develop our bodies with weights. Three nights a week and most Saturdays, John was there every time we were there. John was a serious body-builder himself. He competed in the Mr. Universe Contest, but couldn't place because he was only 5'1" (at least 4" too short to be a serious contender). He had an almost perfect physique even several years after he competed. Picture this: me at 6'5" and now a whopping 165 pounds (made even more handsome because of a mouth full of braces), along with my friend, Tom, becoming regular workout partners with John.

Over the next three years, with John's gentle and at times not so gentle guidance, Tom and I developed strong bodies. For the first time in my life, I could feel good about the way I looked. I was gaining the self-confidence to support a strong self-reliance. More importantly, I learned through John and his example of the way he handled himself that most of the ways I was living (such as taking advantage of this new found strength, lying, stealing, cheating, and drinking) were wrong. That touch of love from John was a great boost, at just the right time. God's timing is always perfect. Unfortunately, John only started me down the right path, one I would leave all too often in the coming years.

When I worked, I always worked hard. I learned this from my dad. Instead of a paper route, which was about the only job available to a 13 year old, I had regular, contracted customers that I cut grass for or shoveled their snow. One day, it started to snow heavily and by 6 o'clock (our normal work out time at the "Y") there was about a foot of snow on the ground and more coming down. School had let out early, and Tom spent the afternoon at my house.
My Mother could always make room for a friend, even though we never asked her in advance. Tom and I decided to go to the “Y” until it quit snowing. Then, we were going to stay out all night and shovel snow. When we arrived at the “Y”, we were surprised that John was there. As we walked in, he was sitting alone at his small, broken, hand-me-down desk, looking through a photo album. Instead of working our bodies that night, John gave our hearts and our minds a real workout. John was a photographer during World War II, assigned an infantry unit responsible for liberating two of the worst German death camps. It was John, who through his camera lens saw and recorded the atrocities that we now see replayed on PBS specials, in movies such as Schindler’s List, and on the walls of the Holocaust Museum.

We spent three hours listening to John’s stories as we turned through the pages in the album, looking at pictures of horror even worse than on the page before. I don’t remember John talking of God or Jesus, but that night I had my first real lesson in life and death. Impressions were left on my heart that night that would help me to come to know that God loves me and has plans for my life. That night I realized I had never known of a time when Christ hadn’t been with me (although there were too many times I hadn’t been with Him). Also, that night, Jesus Christ (through John) placed on my heart a touch of love I shall never forget. “All I know is that the touch of love has forever changed all I know.”

We left John that night, and Tom and I have never discussed what we saw or how we felt. All night we shoveled snow. (We each made $120 . . . a lot of money in 1958.) Although I didn’t know it at the time, that evening would begin a lifetime of shaping by His touch.

For over 40 years, I carried John’s photos and a question in my heart. In November of 1999, a new touch of love, Iwona Drozek, accompanied me through Poland and took me through Auschwitz. The question I had on my heart was, “Where was God when this was happening?” My question was answered that day. He was there doing as He promised. He brought comfort to those who loved him. I came away from one of the worst camps so full of peace because his presence is still there.

John is dead now. I tried to send this story to his wife, but for some reason when Vera asked for her address, she didn’t want to give it out. Mr. Isserman, my 5th and 6th grade teacher, and John were the first people outside my family that cared enough to help bring out all that God had blessed me with. Initially, they were strangers that took a risk and helped someone that couldn’t possibly thank or help them in return. Noah, I have gone back to visit Mr. Isserman and thanked him. I’ll also send him and Mrs. Cline a copy of this. Once they know that their caring has made a difference and is being passed on, I pray they will receive the thanks they never sought.
Chapter 2: Lala

I Corinthians 1:4
“I give thanks to God always for you because of the grace of God which was given to you in Christ Jesus.”

I've told you that I can't remember Christ ever not being with me, and I've just realized why. LALA, my grandmother (my father's mother), must get the credit for introducing me to Jesus when I was very young and fixed Him to my heart forever. I'd like to tell you a little about her.

Lyle Wells was your great-great grandmother; and those aren't enough greats to describe how great she was. She and my grandfather divorced after having three children. He inherited an 8th of the Wells company and must have thought it's time to party. Lala, as she insisted that we call her, raised two boys and a girl, with little or no help from my Grandfather, who, doesn't seem to have been so grand. My father didn't have much to do with him, as I recall, probably because of the way he treated his mother.

Lala's oldest son, Fritz, suffered from a disease called Osteomyelitis, which at the time was impossible to treat. Lala had to bury Fritz when he was just 19 years old. In the years to come, I would be there to watch her bury her daughter, Hope, as well as my father. Despite what must have been a very difficult and, at many times, lonely life, Lala was always there with her own very special version of a touch of love. As I watch your grandmother (that should be a capital “g” in Nana's grand) take care of you, I am happily reminded of Lala and her unselfish love and sharing with her grandchildren. Lala, just like Nana, could have her world falling in all around her and it wouldn't matter to her; she would stay focused on one of her grandchildren and that child was all that mattered to her.
Lala was raised in a very rigid, but devoted, Methodist home in Memphis and did her best to pass those teachings and practices on to her children and grandchildren. It must have been very difficult for her to make sure her children went to church. The Wells clan was Catholic, and she was a single parent that never learned to drive a car.

Lala could make the simplest things seem so special to her grandchildren (at least to me). A ride on the end of her foot or a ride with her on a bus downtown on a Saturday morning was always made special, because of her and her type of touch of love. Once in a while, we would ride in a taxi, and Lala would make you feel like you were in a chauffeured limousine. It was only after my father died that I realized the reason that she didn’t drive was because she never could afford a car, yet she gave so generously. Everything she gave to her four grandchildren, she must have taken away from herself. I was very sad when I realized how little she had to live on.

I drink tea today, and, almost every time I do, it reminds me of Lala’s visits when I was a child and sick. As soon as she found out one of her grandchildren was sick, she would walk (no matter the weather) the two blocks from her one-room apartment to our house. She would prepare tea and cinnamon toast, removing the crust and cutting it into strips, then sit at our bedside, sometimes for hours, until we would go to sleep. Many times, as I ate, she would give me a special little present, like a new Timex pocket watch or flashlight to help me feel better, and it always worked.

It never seemed to bother me that I would disappoint my parents; their spankings only hurt physically, but I hated to disappoint Lala. If she spanked us, she would use a dry wash cloth, so it wouldn’t hurt . . . but, it did (though not physically). Knowing I had done something that forced her to have to spank me hurt me and I just hated to disappoint her. Although she never said so, she had to be really disappointed when my father found me in a cigar store, one Sunday morning, when I was supposed to be in church. Lala would give me 50 cents to put in the offering plate. I would walk to church, go in and get a program for proof that I’d been to church, and leave through another door, taking my offering money to go play the pinball machine at Beckers Cigar store. Each game cost a nickel. When my dad walked in, I had 45 cents and about 35 free games racked up. He said, “get in the car” and without thinking I said absolutely the wrong thing. I was standing in the corner of the store, with the pinball machine’s front legs resting on my toes so the ball wouldn’t roll back so fast, and I answered back, “wait a minute, I’ve got 35 free games racked up. I spent the rest of the day regretting my answer.

Lala also had a way of making your birthday a special occasion. She would give each of her grandchildren one dollar for every year they were old until we were ten, but that’s not what made it special. She never went to a horse race or gambled, yet she always gave us our birthday money with as many two-dollar bills (the bill of choice at the racetrack) as our age would allow.
For example if we were seven, we got three of them and a one-dollar bill. She told us they were lucky because people used them to win money betting on horses. I pray that I will have enough time in your life to be the same positive influence on you, as Lala was on me.

As a reminder of Lala and her touches of love, I have always carried a two-dollar bill. Almost every time I get money out of my wallet, I am reminded of how very special I am to God, thanks in part to the memories I have of how Lala made me feel so special with her unconditional love. I will never be able to fully describe that extra special touch of hers, sometimes described as unconditional love. An example for you to understand would be to compare it to the love your Nana has for you. I pray that unlike your father’s grandmothers, Nana will be here to see you united before God with the one He chooses for you to marry. Noah, at this point, I don’t want to leave you with the wrong impressions that Nana’s love for you is the only example of unconditional love for you to see. The love that God has for us is unconditional and the best example of that is His gift of Jesus. Another one, that’s just as good is Christ’s willingness to die on the cross for you, for me, for everyone… unconditionally.

If you watch our home movies of your father’s first birthday, you will see Lala. Better yet, I have had my father’s home movies put on video, and perhaps one night you and I can watch them together. I will introduce you to Lala. Maybe you will even see her giving your Dad a ride on her foot, making him feel special like she did me 20 years earlier. Lala showed me by her example how to love unconditionally, but I believe that Nana learned to actually love that way better than Lala did. When I see her with you, my heart wells up with joy and love, and I am reminded of Lala’s unconditional love for me. I know that it was Grace to me, just as Nana’s love is Grace to you. You and I are two very lucky guys to have the grandmothers we’ve been blessed with.
Chapter 3:

The Holy Spirit

I Corinthians 15:10
“By the grace of God I am what I am and His grace toward me was not in vain.”

The greatest gift we have received from God is Himself in the form of Jesus Christ. Jesus loved us so much He took our sins to the cross with Him, granting us forgiveness and winning our salvation. Now that’s a “Touch of Love”! Before He returned to Heaven He offered us a friend, counselor, guide, and a constant reminder of His love. This last gift is known by many names, I know Him as The Holy Spirit. I know that now, but not when The Holy Spirit first started to work in my life. When I first realized there was a presence working in my life, I thought it was God. I guess in reality it was... Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yes, three in one, but each plays a different role in our lives.

Before I was 21, I was in four accidents, and I could have died in any of them. I will tell you later about the first one (the first day I got my driver’s license and wrecked the car.) The second happened when I went sailing with my girlfriend, her father, and another young man. Her parents never liked me (with good reason), because of the way I treated Jenny. (Jenny, I am truly sorry for the way I treated you; it's one of the very few things in my life I wish I could undo.) I believed they really wanted her to date another boy. If I was one of her parents, I would have wanted that too. For the three years that we dated off and on, I would always offer to help her dad work on the boat he was building (fall back on brown-nosing – remember). If I remember correctly, the boat was about 30 feet long. He built it in the basement until it was so big that it took a very large hole in the end of the basement wall to get the boat out, up, and into the garage where it would be finished. No matter how much I helped him, it didn't make him like me any better, and I didn't want to cook or clean to try to influence her mother.
We weren't dating when he finally launched the boat. Later that summer, when we started to date again, Jenny's dad asked me to come sailing with them. (Maybe he was planning to throw me overboard a long way from shore.) I'd never been on a sailboat before, but I was very comfortable in or on the water, and maybe he'd like me if I was a good sailor. When we got to the marina, we were the only ones there. That should have been a sign, but blue skies and a strong wind were what we wanted. We all boarded the boat and pushed off, without our life jackets on (mistake number two).

The harbor in Kenosha was built during the depression with two breakwaters about 100 yards apart, going straight east out into the lake. There was a 30 to 40 mile-per-hour wind straight out of the west, and we were all inexperienced sailors. We were so bad, we didn't put the centerboard down before we put the sail up (mistake number three). If you ever know anything about sailing, you'll know we were an accident waiting to happen . . . and it did. The boat shot out from in between those breakwaters into the open water of Lake Michigan as if we were shot out of a cannon. At first, I thought it was going to be fun, but as we passed the coast guard watch tower at the end of one of the breakwaters, Jenny's dad saw the small craft warning flags flying, and he realized we needed to go back. At the same time, we could see the 10-15 foot waves on the open water. The water was so rough that the coast guard knew nobody would try to go out in wind and water like this. That's why they weren't manning the tower. Before we could try to come about, we were 1/2 mile out in lake Michigan. When we started to turn, with the full sail 90 degrees to the wind and the centerboard still up, over we went. On the way over, the mast hit Jenny's dad in the head and, as we went into the water, I grabbed him. Before we knew what happened, the mast was pointing straight down and we were bobbing around like little corks. No one had life jackets on; they were still in the cabin, which was now under water, and, I was the only one that knew how to swim. I got every one to the hull of the boat and had Jenny hold on to her dad while I dove under the water into the cabin I found three of the four life jackets that were supposed to be there. All the while, the wind kept pushing us further and further away from shore. After about 20 minutes of hanging on to the boat, I decided I would swim to shore for help. (This would have been the biggest and last mistake of my life.) Just as I removed my shirt and shoes and was about to leave the boat, we bobbed to the top of a wave. I pushed away from the boat and, at the same time I saw the Coast Guard cutter heading toward us. In just a few seconds, the overturned boat was so far away from me that it took every bit of energy, swimming as hard as I could, to get back to it. When I did, I grabbed my shirt from Jenny, climbed up on the hull, and started waving and yelling.

A lot happened that day between the time we saw that cutter and when we got back to shore. Several touches of love saved us that day. A drunken, unknown, maybe homeless man was on the end of one of the breakwaters and saw us go over. He quickly sobered up and ran to the Coast Guard station. It took him several minutes to convince the men inside that he really saw a boat capsize.
Because of his insistence, they went outside and saw the empty slip where our boat had been. They launched the cutter and went looking for us. After the Coast Guard pulled out, he left, never to be seen again. Some day when you are at our house, ask Nana to show you the newspaper story (I think she still has it) and my picture on the front page of the paper. They said I was a hero... that I saved lives, but that's wrong. The Touch of Love, working through that stranger, was the real hero that day. By the way, after that day, I was always welcomed with open arms at Jenny's house.

Believe it or not, two or three of my accidents happened on the same day in August for two or three years in a row... I think it was the first three.

In August of 1962, I was the assistant golf pro at Nippersink Country Club. I had just upgraded my living conditions from the employee dormitory to the back room of the pro-shop. After sharing a large room with seven other guys I didn't know, it was great to have my own room. The fact that I would have to walk through the pro-shop and down the basement to shower didn't bother me at all.

One night, at three in the morning, as I was sound asleep, I heard a voice say "get up and eat something." I also felt a hand shake me. I got up without hesitation and walked toward the snack counter, without getting dressed. Just as I left my room, a large tree branch came crashing through a six-foot square, plate glass window that my bed was directly under. In fact, the window sill was the same height as the bed. The force of the wind coming through the broken window blew the door shut just as I walked through it. I could hardly get the door opened against the force of the wind to see what had happened. When I did get back into my room and turn the lights on, I saw a pillow that was shredded and several large pieces of glass sticking straight into the mattress, having cut through the blanket and sheets on my bed. This is the first time I actually knew of this presence and that the Holy Spirit was real, in my life. The Touch of Love touched me... It shook me.

In 1964, I bought a 1962 Chevy Impala from my parents just after they became homeowners at Nippersink (the club I worked at). I upgraded again and moved back into their house. I had my own entrance and would come and go as I pleased. Most nights I stayed out too late. I can remember my dad saying to me one night, "If I leave for work before you get home one more time, you'll have to live somewhere else." It didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out the answer to this problem. All I needed to do was be home by 5 A.M., because my dad always left for work at 5:30. One night, (actually early one morning) I did something really stupid and wrong, I drove my car after I had way too much to drink. Of all the things I've done wrong, this was about the worst, because my selfish, thoughtless, and foolish act could have put others at risk. No matter that I was doing something that was wrong...maybe dead wrong...the Holy Spirit, was there as I got in the car and told me to put my seat belt on.
never done it before, but I did this time without thought or hesitation. As I drove over the Fox River bridge on Highway 50, I fell asleep. My car left the road just as it crossed the west end of the bridge. I awoke as the car slid down the road embankment that was so steep that if I hadn't been wearing that seat belt I would have been thrown to the passenger side of the car and away from the steering wheel. Because of the seat belt holding me in place, I was able to hold onto the wheel and steer the car to the bottom of the embankment and along the bottom until I was going slow enough to drive back onto the highway.

Noah, please understand that I'm not telling you these stories because I'm proud of them or because I want you to think that Grace can protect you from your own stupidity, selfishness and arrogance. I am merely sharing with you the power of Grace, even when it's well disguised and I was so undeserving. I also pray that as you read about my experiences, it will become easier for you to recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit when He plays a part in your life. (I have the same prayer for anyone reading this.) Noah, if you do your Pops only one favor, please, please do this one: "Do not tempt the Lord thy God" and do things, like I did, that require His touch of love just to protect you from yourself.
I was just 15 when I first met Nana. We were both at a dance held each Friday night at the Y.M.C.A. I saw her from the other side of a very crowded dance floor. My best friend Tom, who was with me, spotted her at the same time I did. She was new in town and the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. The moment I saw her, I knew there was something special about her, and my feelings for her are just as strong today as they were 40 years ago. Neither my friend Tom nor I had the courage to ask her for a dance, let alone a date for ourselves, so I went over and told her that my friend would like to ask her out. Some way, somehow, after that clumsy start, she and Tom started to date, while I dated Nana’s best friend just so we could double date and I could be near her. Well, in the process, I didn’t treat her friend very well, and that certainly didn’t gain me any points with Nana.

After about a year, and well after Tom and Nana stopped dating, I worked up the courage to ask her if she would go out with me. I couldn’t believe it when she said yes. Our first date was to an afternoon high school wrestling match. (Nana describes it as a safe date.) This was the first and only wrestling match I’ve ever been to. I couldn’t have been that smart to figure that Nana wouldn’t feel threatened there. For whatever reason (perhaps “I” didn’t), I picked that time and place for our first date. After we had been there for a short time, I said to Nana, “I want you to be the mother of my children.” I don’t remember her reaction, or her response. I’ve heard her say many years later, as I was telling that story that her thoughts were, “guess again, pal!” I was in love... a special type of love that comes to very few but once in a lifetime. I knew she was to be the love of my life for the rest of my life. “It just took her a little longer to feel that way about me. I was touched by love, and I know it was our Lord that was in control that day.
We dated every night for three or four months, never missing a night doing something together. She loved to dance.
I couldn’t hear the beat and hated dancing. So, on nights there were dances, I would drop Nana at the dance and go to the pool hall to shoot pool until the dance was over.
I would go back and wait for her to come out; then, we would get something to eat before I took her home. It doesn't sound very romantic, but that touch of being apart helped us develop trust and respect for each other and our individual choices. It also helped us to learn to give each other space while loving each other. The old adage is true that you don't have anything until you can let it go.

We dated throughout high school. Nobody could understand why she would want to date me. The Tom they knew simply wasn't good enough for her; they didn't know the Tom that I only shared with Nana. The touch of Nana's love has changed forever what I knew and what I was to be.

After I finished high school, I didn’t want to go to college, much to my parents disappointment (how or why they put up with me I’ll never know). I took a job as an assistant golf professional at Nippersink Country Club about 30 miles from home. Nana and I managed that summer. Much like the dance and pool hall dates, we were separate, but together. I didn't have a car and neither did Nana, but we managed to see each other two or three times a week, when I could borrow a car. That wasn't enough; I needed a car. When the golf season ended that year, I went to work at the Frank L. Wells Company to earn enough money to get that car and to have the extra money I needed to support myself the next summer at the golf club. The first summer I made 80 dollars a month, plus tips and lesson fees. I told you Nana would change what I was to be. If I wouldn't have wanted to see Nana every night, I wouldn't have wanted a car that much. I wouldn't have worked as a machinist to get one. I wouldn't have known the life with Nana we have shared together. And, I wouldn't have known you!

I don't remember exactly when it was that I bought an engagement ring to make official what I had known from the very first night at the “Y”, but I do remember being so afraid she’d say no when I offered it to her. Just like when I asked her to that wrestling match, she said, “Yes.” From that point until October 9, 1965, we had our share of fights and break-ups. Almost always they were my fault . . . really they were! We broke our engagement three times. Each time it was because I had done something wrong. The last time, I got the ring back, I took it to a pawnshop and traded it for a watch. I thank God that He loves me so much that He gave Nana whatever it took for her to say yes that July night when I asked her to marry me once again. Nana was smart; she didn't say yes that night.
She said that she would think it over, we would go to dinner the next night, and I would ask her properly. I think she had already said yes in her heart, but she didn’t let me know it. At dinner she said yes again, but this time it was different. We set a date. To this day Nana doesn’t have an engagement ring, but I plan to buy her one on our fiftieth wedding anniversary.

I'll never forget the first day of our marriage. We couldn’t afford a honeymoon. I was to go back to work on Monday. Nana was going to take Monday off. That Sunday, we went to the grocery store and bought five carts full of everything we needed to stock our apartment. While we were in the store, our car was stolen, but that’s not why I’ll never forget that day. (Nana doesn't think I remember these things, but I can even tell you what Nana was wearing the first night I saw her.) What remains most important about that day was how we dreamed out loud with each other, establishing our life's plans and goals.

I would work hard and do whatever it took for Nana to be able to stay at home with the six children we decided to have (as if we were the ones to decide). We believed we could do it, if I could earn $9000 a year. Other than the fact that we were to be blessed with three children rather than six, we have stuck to our plan. I've tried to work hard and Nana became the best mother any child could possibly wish for and more of a wife and friend to me than I could have ever dreamed possible.

At this point in the story, I wish I could tell you how we also turned everything over to God that first day and entrusted Him with our plan for the rest of our lives, but that means I'd have to lie to you. That's something I'll never, never ever do! We were married by Nana's pastor, the same man who baptized and confirmed her. Unlucky for me, he knew me too. I'd dated his daughter and wasn't very nice to her. I'll never know if he wished for someone better for Nana as he was marrying us. My guess is he did. We attended his church after we were married, but he soon retired, and the Lutheran church was no longer the same for Nana. We tried the Methodist church I was confirmed in, but sleeping until noon on Sundays seemed like the better choice. So, we stopped going to church, and I put God and Christ on the shelf, like a knickknack; to be there, but not used for anything. But, unlike our other knickknacks, God and Jesus were put on the top shelf, pushed way to the back, out of sight, out of mind and, sadly, out of my heart.
Nana worked for two years. We saved every penny she earned and lived on my income. After 11 months, we bought our first home . . . all 900 square feet of it. A year later, we decided to begin our family. One year later, your father was born. I was working 68 hours a week at the Wells Company, becoming a Journeyman Machinist, which is still my only formal degree. I did qualify to become a Class A golf professional, but I didn't pay the $200 to become certified. I decided I wanted to be a member of a golf club, not an employee, just before we were married. Your Nana must have been crazy, agreeing to marry a man who not only quit his job, but also his career! Somehow she always seemed to know we'd be all right; she was filled with faith and the touch of love.

I pray that you have brought just half the joy into your father's and mother's life, as your dad did in his first two years of his life with us. During that time, I had my second back operation (I had two more discs removed) and Nana had a miscarriage, which I know troubled her more than it did me. I regret not being more caring and sympathetic to her feelings and needs at that time. I went on as if nothing had happened, and soon Nana was pregnant again with Kristine. When she was born, once again, I cried for joy. Bring on the next four! It really didn't matter if they would be boys or girls, now that we had one of each.

To be continued...
Chapter 5:  Mom & Dad

II Corinthians 4:15
“It is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.”

What patience and love they must have had! I love you mom and dad.

More times than not, I’m sure I was hard to be proud of and love, but mom and dad never made me feel that way. I was always tall and, until I was 14, too skinny. At six or seven, I was supposed to wear a patch over the right lens of an ugly pair of glasses; the patch was supposed to fix a lazy eye problem. What a sight! (When you need a good laugh, look at a picture of me at that stage of my life in our old family photos.)

My father was a tool and die maker. It was an honorable job, but it didn't pay enough for him to have investments or begin to accumulate savings. His father and his father’s family had money, but he wanted no part of it. Evidently, his parent’s divorce and the way his dad and family acted toward his mother after that drove them apart. I’m not certain of this, because my mother, father and Lala never talked about it. In 1950 or 1951, dad decided to move to California to open his own tool and die shop. He believed California would offer great growth opportunities, but his employer, Mr. Lumberg, convinced him to work for the Wells Company. Dad's family owned this manufacturer of wire-working machinery; it was started by his grandfather.

He worked there until he retired in May of 1972 at the age of 55. He started to lose his eyesight at age 48 and had lost 90% of his sight by the time he retired. I never heard him complain about the loss of his sight or, for that matter, anything else. I also don't know if he could ever see well enough to know just how beautiful his grandchildren were. I know he couldn't the last two years of his life.
Less than two years before he died was the last time we hunted deer together. I first went hunting pheasants with him when I was nine and deer hunting the next year. I killed my first deer at 11, and dad had it mounted for me. It’s the one in the shop. We had hunted deer every year, but one. We always had a great time together; I felt like dad treated me as an equal when we were hunting. I will never forget the evening we spent in a run-down hunting shack, watching him dance around a pot bellied stove with Tom Fox (the man I was named after). I laughed so hard when they both broke through the rotten floor. What a night.

It was our last hunt together. On opening day, we went out two hours before daylight, as usual. Heavy cloud cover made the night almost black. Dad led the way for about two miles from the road to his favorite hill. I moved about a mile from him. I always stood for a while in one place and then would wander for a while. He would always stay on his hill. He had killed 30 deer from that hill in 35 years - - can’t fault him for not moving around.

Shooting time was around 6:00 AM, and at about 9:00 AM it started to snow. It became real windy, and the temperature was dropping. By 10:00, I could barely see, so I headed to dad’s hill. I got there at 10:30 and, when I got within 10 yards of him, I could just barely see him standing with his hand on the barrel of his favorite gun, with the gun butt half hidden in the snow. (I’m sure it was resting on his foot.) The hand that held the gun had about six inches of snow on it. Dad didn’t see or hear me coming, but I didn’t know it. When I was within a few feet of him, I said, “Let’s go, I can’t see and I’m getting cold”. I always knew dad could stand almost still on that hill, so it didn’t surprise me to see the snow on top of his hand. What I discovered next broke my heart, and made me feel closer to my dad than ever before. I took his gun to carry it out for him. When I went to unload it before starting for the car, I found that the gun was not loaded. He hadn’t loaded it that day, because he couldn’t see well enough to tell what he was shooting at. He was afraid he’d mistake me for a deer. He had stood there for hours holding an empty gun, knowing he wouldn’t shoot anything. Hunting was always important to him. Now watching him deal with his blindness, I realized just how much, but this time I think it was more important for him to be with me. For the first time in all those years we had hunted, I led him off that hill on Coffee Lake out to the car and drove back to the lodge. We never talked about that morning . . . something I truly regret. I wish I could live that day over again. The next day I got my deer. Dad didn’t go out; he said he didn’t feel well.
As I write this, I’m wondering what was on his mind that morning, as he stood there for 4-1/2 hours with an unloaded gun. Was he praying or just talking to God? It’s the same thing you know. My dad was a real man. Unfortunately I didn’t realize it or give him credit for it until long after he died!

When I was about nine, we moved up the street into a 100-year-old home. Over the next 10 years, I helped him remodel most of the house. In fact, that’s about the only time (besides hunting) that we got along. I learned a lot from him... in fact, more than any other man in my life. I can’t say “person”, because of what Nana has taught me. When I joined the Wells Company, he taught me to be a machinist, a toolmaker, an engineer, a sales/service technician, a manager and, most importantly, he provided an opportunity for God-given talents to flourish. I was a very lucky son. I’m sorry that I didn’t give him many reasons to feel lucky about being my father while he was alive. Perhaps, as he looks after me from Heaven, he’s feeling lucky and proud.
I pray it’s so.

My mother was a great mom; almost as good as Nana. She, like Nana, was very beautiful and always willing to put her wants and needs behind everyone else’s. There was many a dinner when one of us would bring a friend to dinner without asking or telling her. There was always enough food for them, even if she wound up eating leftovers from the day before.

I stole money from her and then lied to her about it. I don’t know how many times I disappointed her that way or, worse yet, broke her heart, but she was just like Jesus or the prodigal son’s father... always ready to love and support me. By the way, she never let me get away with stealing or lying. She always called me on it, even though she knew that I’d lie again and disappoint her even more.

After I was married, she made Nana feel like one of her daughters. One day, she told Nana about her failed marriage at the age of 19, something I don’t think she had told her own children yet. Nana and I spent many weekends with her before and after my father died. On one occasion, she gave Nana the goodbye note I wrote them when I ran away from home at age 16. She had carried it in her wallet all those years and never told me she had saved it. I was surprised, but that shows you how stupid I am. Of course, a mother would save something like that.

When I was 16, I left home with only this note as a goodbye to my family. I was headed for Florida (no special reason) to begin a life on my own. I was going to support myself by getting a job in the construction trade. I had $312 in my pocket that I had withdrawn from an account that my parents had set up years ago. I wasn’t supposed to have access to it until I was 18, but the bank teller didn’t ask my age and I didn’t volunteer. At least I didn’t have to lie to get this money, which I mostly earned from snow shoveling the last winter.
I wasn't running away because my parents were angry with me, punishing me, or treating me unfairly. I wasn't running away because I had just broken up with my girlfriend. I was leaving because I just wanted to be on my own. I simply didn't like being told what to do or when to do it. I was bored with school . . . it was too easy, no challenge, even though I took the hard classes. (I had perfected my methods of lying, cheating, and brown-nosing.) As for mom and dad, it wasn't just my lying, stealing, or disobedience that hurt them . . . I was leaving them with the pain of not knowing where their child was or how he was doing.

Within the last four months I had been arrested for selling beer to minors (you could buy beer at 18 then). When the police called my dad late that night to see if he wanted to post bail or come get me in the morning, he asked them why I had been arrested; they told him. He said that I was only 15, a minor, so how could he sell something to a minor. I got a good talking to by the police, who drove me home. (It was after curfew, so dad made them take me home). Then, I got another good talking to by my father. (I wished I'd spent the night in jail.) I was thankful the police assumed that the store clerk thought I was 18 and sold me the beer. If they had searched me, they would have found my fake ID.

I turned 16 a few weeks later and, after failing my driver's test three times in three weeks, I finally passed. My dad sent me on an errand just to let me drive alone for the first time. After being behind a truck that was driving way too slow for me and throwing water from the wet highway onto my windshield, I passed him the first chance I got. I was driving a 1957 Ford Station Wagon, with the biggest engine Ford made. Going down hill, just as I passed the truck, I looked at the speedometer. I was going 90 miles per hour, and thinking, "Guess I smoked him." Of course, I didn't have a seat belt on. I don't remember if we had them back then. It didn't matter; I wouldn't have worn it anyway. When I cut the steering wheel to turn back into my lane, I turned too quick. My inexperience caused me to overcorrect. The car was swerving; it spun out of control, went into the ditch, and rolled three times. When the car came to rest, it was upside down. I was holding onto the steering wheel, lying on my back against the interior roof of the car, with my feet almost touching the tailgate. I can only remember saying one word during the whole ordeal. (I won't say it, but it has four letters and begins with “s”.) As soon as I realized I wasn't hurt, I tried to get out of the car. The doors were all jammed, and I had to kick my way out. As I walked out of the ditch, the truck driver walked up to see if I was all right, then took me to the nearest farmhouse. When I called home to tell them what happened, my dad answered the phone. (I had hoped it would be my mother.) He asked if I was all right; I said I was, but I didn't tell him the details or that the car was destroyed. Mom and dad were justifiably upset with me. I know now, as a parent myself, that it wasn't the car. It was what could have happened to me. You should have seen their faces when they saw that car, but, when I got home, I really got it from my brother. He was really mad at me. He had a date that night. We only had one car, and I had just wrecked it and his date.
Back to running away . . . I took the train to Chicago, as I had done many times with Lala. There was a long layover while I waited for the train to Florida. Rather than wait alone, I called a girl, who lived in Chicago that I met at Devil's Lake. (My friend Tom and I had hitchhiked the 90 miles to get there, with no money and only our jeans and a T-shirt over our bathing suits. We stayed five days earning money setting up tents for people and sleeping under newspapers on the floor of the washrooms. Sometime I'll tell you that story when we're fishing. When she got to the station, she tried to talk me out of leaving. Not succeeding, she called my parents that evening and told them what train I was on. They had the police take me off the train when it stopped in Jackson, Tennessee. I was playing poker with five or six men on the train, who would have had all my money within the hour if the police hadn't shown up. (I wasn't nearly as good of a card player as I thought I was.) The police not only took me off the train, but they also took all of my money back from the men who had taken it from me. When I got to the police station, they called my father and put me on the phone with him. He asked me if I was ready to come home. I said no. He asked to speak to the officer, and the next thing I knew I was behind bars for the night, with a roll of toilet paper for a pillow! Seventeen hours later my dad was looking through those bars, asking again if I was ready to come home. Again I said, "No." This time he said, "You have two choices: come home and live under our rules until you finish high school or go to a juvenile home and finish school there!" I did not need to be very bright to make that choice. Home we went, not saying much during the 17-hour ride.

For the first time in my life, as I am writing this, I'm actually thinking about and haunted by what must have been going through my father's mind. He drove all night by himself to come for me. I know how I would feel if it was your dad! I'm also wondering if he ever considered asking me to help drive on the way home. He drove down and back without any rest.

My father died three days after we learned Kristine had Neiman-Pick. He died not knowing if your father was affected. He loved your dad. Someday, when you watch those home movies I speak of, you'll see the love in his face when he's letting go of your dad's little hand as he took his first steps or when he's giving him a ride on his John Deere mower.

Right after he died, I decided to take care of my mother for the rest of her life. That was in 1972. She died in 1994. Over those 22 years, we became as close as any mother and son could be, just like Nana and your dad are now. Mother and I laughed, cried, golfed, and vacationed together (ask Nana about the fishing trip to Canada sometime).
We asked her to live with us, but she wouldn't hear of it. She would live out her life in the retirement home she and my dad had built in Northern Wisconsin just before he died... And she did, despite the long, cold winters and the hot summers. She worked at various jobs, telling her children it was just something to do. But, it was a necessity, since my father's early retirement and untimely death kept him from adequately providing for her. Just like Lala, she never let her children know how little money she had. When her father died a few years later, he left her enough money to live out her life. She was finally able to work “just because she wanted to”. This son that had lied and stole money from his mother was now to be trusted with all of her money and stocks. Mother gave me the power of attorney to invest her money as I saw fit. For the rest of her life, she never asked to see any type of statement or accounting of her finances... Only a mother is capable of showing love and trust like this.

Five years before she died, mother discovered she had cancer. She fought, never giving it anymore slack than she did me when I lied to her. During this time, grace brought her together with Jim. He was five to eight years older than her, but in very good shape. He lived 15 miles from her house, and they saw each other often. They started out just having fun, then fell in love. One October, mother called me to explain that it was getting cold and Jim's furnace wasn't working. She explained that he would put a new one in next spring. Mother wanted to know how I would feel about Jim moving in with her. She was 72 and he was about 80, and she was asking me for permission to live with a man she wasn’t married to. She said marriage would be a hassle; there were just too many papers to sign. As she was going through this long justification, I interrupted and told her that Judie and I couldn’t be happier. I said that we would see them at Christmas and hoped Jim would be living there. That spring, as I was helping Jim install garage doors at his home, I asked him why he didn’t just give his place to his children and live with mom year round. Jim said that if he knew that he would die before my mother he would, but, if she went first, he would have no where to go. It's sad that people at the twilight of their lives have to think and plan like that. My mother died before your mother and father were married, but they invited Jim to their wedding. Make sure they point him out to you in the group picture taken at their reception.

I knew all my life that, like Jesus, my parents loved me and were always there, ready to forgive and love me. But, for the first 45 years of my life, I could not recall my mother or father ever saying, “I love you,” nor could I recall saying it to them. I guess we just took it for granted.
Noah, please don’t make that mistake. Don't ever take anyone's love for granted. Be a real man, like Jesus. Tell them you love them, especially your wife, children and, of course, your parents. As Nana and I raised our children, we made sure we didn’t make that mistake. We always told them we loved them, and there was a lot of hugging too. I’ll never forget dropping your father at his fraternity when he began college. I didn't want to embarrass him by hugging him after he kissed his mother goodbye, so, when it was my turn, I extended my hand to shake his. As I did, he pushed it aside and gave me a great big long hug and told me he loved me. I'm sure it was loud enough for others to hear, but that didn't matter to him. I also knew from that time forward it wouldn't matter to Tom who was around. We would always say, “I love you” as part of our goodbyes. I pray that you treat your dad the same way when he takes you to your first day of college.

When my mother was first diagnosed with cancer, it began to trouble me that we were never vocal with our love. I also never heard her say that she had accepted Christ as her Savior and that troubled me even more. I could remember my father working in church, but I couldn't remember my mother being there. As children, we were given the choice where we wanted to be confirmed. My mother’s family was Jewish and my father’s family was Catholic. Lala was a Methodist. I couldn't recall church being important to my mother when I was a child, but I knew she had been attending a Methodist church near her home in Wisconsin for the last few years. One day, I wrote her a letter and closed it by asking her if she had accepted Jesus as her personal Savior. (I didn't have the courage to ask her face to face or over the phone.)

Three weeks and several telephone conversations later, I still had no answer to my question. I was even more afraid to ask, because now I thought the answer was no, and I didn’t know if I had the courage or ability to witness to my own mother. I had been praying since her cancer started. I wanted so badly for her to have a relationship with Jesus, yet I had no courage. I couldn’t stand the thought of failing my mother again. As we ended our next phone call, she said, “You know the question you asked in your letter? Not waiting for my reply, she said, "The answer is yes!" Without giving it a thought, I said, "I love you, mom," for the first time in my life that I could remember. The phone went silent for a long period, then she said goodbye. Hadn't she heard me? I was disappointed that she hadn't responded to what I said, but I wasn't going to give up. It felt great to tell mom I loved her, and I wasn't going to stop.

I decided to end all our conversations with, "I love you, mom". I cried when I heard her say, “I love you, Tom”, as we ended our next call. From that time until she died, we never said goodbye without saying, “I love you.” They were the last words we said to each other, as I stood by her bed, holding her hand when she died.
The grace given me through having such wonderful parents is the same grace that brought me peace when I dealt with the fact that I never told my father I loved him before he died.

I LOVE YOU, MOM AND DAD
In January of 1974, John Hensley and I conducted training classes in a Leggett & Platt factory just south of Dallas, Texas. The classes were held every Saturday morning between 7:00 a.m. and 12:00 noon. We instructed a group of machine operators and specialists on the proper operating procedures for machinery built by the Wells Company. Attendance was mandatory and, to reinforce this point, Duane Potter, the plant manager, attended every session. In order for John and I to be there on Saturday morning, we had to leave Chicago on Friday afternoon. We scheduled it so we would be at the factory early enough to observe the operations and the results of the prior week’s training.

For 13 weeks in a row, John and I would spend our Friday nights in Ennis, Texas. I met Duane the night before the first class was to be held. He invited us to dinner that night, most likely to find out what type of people Larry Higgins had sent down to train or corrupt the work force he was managing. I’m also sure he did it because he knew what it was like to travel and be away from your family. Over the next 13 weeks, I don’t believe we missed more than two Friday nights with Duane and his wife, Ann. They always made us feel welcome in their lives and their home, even when I ruined Ann’s toaster making toasted peanut butter.

I can’t say that during that time together, Duane and I became best buddies, but we did spend a great deal of time together, in between our conversations about the training and the overall operations of the plant. When the classes ended, Nana and I were invited to a dinner in Dallas. That’s when Duane and Ann met Nana for the first time. Twenty years later, Ann would be the one that would bring your mother and father together... a touch of love.
We got home on a Thursday, and I went to work on Friday as usual, but this Friday afternoon I wouldn’t be leaving for Texas. I would be home playing with our children. Saturday, as I was leaving for work, Nana came into the kitchen holding Larry. She told me that something was wrong with him. She handed him to me and called the doctor, who told us to meet her at the hospital. We left immediately. After going through what is almost always a very slow process of being admitted, we were taken to a room. The three of us (Nana, Larry, and me) were alone while the nurse went to get something. Nana was holding Larry when he started to go into what appeared to be convulsions.

Nana handed him to me. As I held Larry, Nana looked first at Larry and then, with a mother’s knowledge that something was really wrong, she looked to me to do something. All we could do was watch our son die. That moment of death, so long and so painful for us, was so peaceful for Larry. I will never know how long we stood there before we cried out for help. Larry’s death came with no warning. There was no time to say goodbye and no time to prepare for what you can never really prepare for. Then, all hell broke loose. The nurses began pulling Larry away from me, yelling “code blue”. A doctor arrived, a trachea tube was inserted . . . all for nothing. Larry was dead. I was 29, Nana was 28, your Dad was six, and Kristine was four and had the same disease that weakened Larry and led to his death.

It was perfect funeral weather . . . a cold and dreary April day, too warm to snow. A heavy thick mist floated in the air. We were surrounded with loving, caring, family and friends, but no one knew what they could do to comfort us. None of us had known anyone, except LaLa, that had to bury their child. With people all around us, we were unsupported. I don’t think Nana knew or cared who was there. I know I didn’t. Nana, your Dad, Kristine, and I said goodbye for the last time to Boo Boo . . . that’s right, your nickname . . . a touch! I placed a cross into Larry’s hand that had the words “God loves you” inscribed on it. We closed the casket and went into the ladies lounge to wait for the service to start.

I stood all alone in a bay window of the lounge, knowing I wasn’t any help or comfort to anyone, not even myself. I can’t recall asking God for help or comfort. All I can remember is that I began thinking about ending my life.
That’s how selfish my thoughts were. Just like when I ran away from home, I was only thinking of myself again. Then an image of a person about two blocks away caught my attention. There I am thinking about ending my life and not being able to take my eyes off this crazy guy walking up the street without a hat. Before I could see his face, I focused on his hunched shoulders and his raised jacket collar, thinking about his feeble attempt to stay warm and dry. My eyes were then focused, and I strained to his face. When I recognized it was Duane, I wept. I had thought that over the last 72 hours I was cried out, dry to the bone, and no longer capable of tears or feelings, even for myself. I stood there, away from everyone, weeping just as hard as I had at any time in the last three days. I started thinking, if someone I hardly knew, cared enough to come all the way from Texas, fighting this terrible weather to try to bring comfort to me, then I should and must find the strength to care for and comfort Nana and our other two children. I still don’t know who told him about Larry’s death . . . a touch that would touch.

I know now that God had, through Duane, at that very moment placed on my heart a touch of His love, bringing me the strength and courage to go on. I realized at that very instant that God truly loved us. He would get us through this and, more importantly, Larry was now with Him.
Chapter 7: **Nana**  
(continued)

*Romans 5:2*  
“Through Him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.”

When we brought Kristine home, your father nicked named her Pee Wee . . . a name I would use for the rest of her life, much to her displeasure when she was in junior high and around her friends. To this day, when I talk to her, I call her Pee Wee half the time.

Our first little house was way too small for the four of us. If we were all at the kitchen table, you couldn't walk around it. I could reach the stove, the refrigerator, and the sink from my chair, if I were sitting at the table all alone. I said to Nana one night, let's design and build a house for our future family of eight. After all, I had built a doghouse and a toy box for your dad, so why not a house. (Noah, you’re using that same toy box now.)

A year later and with a lot of help from friends, we moved into a partially finished 4,300 square foot home, with five bedrooms and three and one-half baths. I hired Nana's stepfather to work on it during the day, and I worked on it every night and weekend, with only the well, septic system and the plaster work being contracted out. Talk about on-the-job training! The house was located on two and one-half wooded acres and had a full basement, which was to be one massive play room.

We moved in January of 1972 and, for the second time in my life, I heard a small, soft voice say to me, "It's time to honor and thank God for what you have. Serve Him." The very next Sunday, we were in the Methodist church. We became involved and, within three months, we had made friends with people that God would use to help guide us through our first valley of death. The touches of love we received over the next three years from our God-provided church family continue to support Nana and I. (We love you Chet and Kathy!)
In September of 1972, about a week after our third child, Larry, was born (he was named after Larry Higgins), Nana took Kristine to the doctor for some routine shots. When the doctor examined Kristine, she went white after touching Kristine's distended abdomen, which we called her “special belly”. Something was really wrong. She sent us to the hospital in Kenosha for tests. After three days of tests, there were no answers why Kristine's liver and spleen were enlarged. Our doctor sent us to Dr. Perice, the head of hematology at Children’s Memorial Hospital in Chicago. They thought Kristine had a form of Leukemia. For almost four days of non-stop testing, x-rays, and blood samples, there were still no clues to tell us what was wrong. On Thursday, Dr. Perice told us she had scheduled a liver biopsy for Friday morning and was turning Kristine's case over to the Department of Genetics, whatever that meant.

The hospital rooms were arranged so one parent could stay overnight with their child. Nana insisted that she stay. (Don't ever underestimate her strength and courage to do what has to be done.) She never left Kristine.

I drove 65 miles to and from the hospital every day, which didn't relieve the burden off my heart, but at least I could get it out of sight. Nana couldn't.

The drive home Thursday night and back very early Friday were the longest miles I've ever driven. As if Nana didn't have enough to worry about, I started smoking that Thursday after quitting three years earlier. Nana pleaded with me not to, but once again I only thought of myself. As bad as Nana must have felt for Kristine and herself, she had enough care left in her to reach out to me with her special brand of love. In between cigarettes on the way home, I talked to God. I can't remember what either of us said, but I know it was the conversation and not the smoking and drinking that night that gave me the strength I needed for what was to come. We were also strengthened by the many prayers of our newfound family at church. Our biological families may have been praying for us, but I don't recall them telling us. (Don't ever miss the opportunity to tell someone you are praying for them when prayer is all you can do for them. Prayer is no small gift to someone else. In fact, if you can only do one thing for someone, choose prayer over everything else, because anything else is secondary to prayer. That touch of love can do more good than anything else you could possibly do. I've been touched that way many times, and I know first hand how good that touch feels and the good that comes from it.)

That Friday, we were introduced to two new doctors: Dr. Nadler, head of Genetics and Dr. Kay, his assistant. They, like all the other doctors we had met that week, treated Nana and I like we were the only parents there. More importantly, they treated Kristine like she was their daughter. They asked a lot of questions, but this time more of them were directed toward Nana and I and our family background (the medical history of our parents, where our grandparents and their parents were born etc.)
The biopsy went fine. When Kristine arrived back in her room, I looked at her side to see her wound. I was surprised to see a small bandage over an incision that had been glued together with super glue. That day there were no more tests, x-rays, drawing of blood. We just waited for the results of the biopsy. Kristine and I had some fun for the first time that week when we went to the toy room. If my memory serves me right, Kristine had her favorite meal that day (a cheeseburger and fries from McDonalds). We almost forgot why we were there.

I was back early Saturday morning. I wanted to be there when the test results arrived. I was surprised when Dr. Perice walked into the room, since Kristine was no longer her patient and it was Saturday. This time she was not smiling. I was sitting in a chair, and she came over and sat down beside me. I loved this rather frail looking woman in her late 60’s for caring about three strangers like us. Even though Kristine was no longer her patient, she cared enough to come on a Saturday, not only to find out the results of the biopsy, but also because she had love and compassion for us, which I’m sure she had shown to thousands of other parents and patients over the years. She also had the courage to come to Kristine's room and share those results with us. She had to know how exhausted we were and understood our current mental state. She explained that Kristine had Neiman-Pick disease. She told us that Dr. Nadler and Dr. Kay would give a detailed explanation of just what that meant, but said, as she looked directly at me with the compassionate eyes of Jesus Christ, that Kristine most likely had a life expectancy of three to five years. There were no known cures. Nothing could be done to prevent the disease from taking Kristine's life! I wept and, through those tears, I could still see her eyes. She remained sitting less than two feet from me with her hand on my knee. I cried out to her as if she were God and said, "I had always believed our marriage was made in Heaven." As she continued to stare straight into my tear swollen eyes, she answered, "It was. And God would never give anyone a cross too big for them to bear." She said these words with such uplifting certainty in her voice that I believed her, as if the words were from God's own mouth. I will never forget her, not only because of her caring, but also for getting me through my first lesson of real pain. The touch of love she gave was my first real lesson in the school of hurting that, I'm sorry to say, we must all attend sometime in our life. Please, don't ever miss the opportunity to reach out and give your special version of the touch of love to someone you know is hurting. As your Nana told me and I pray she will also have the opportunity to explain this very important lesson to you: "At the end of our life, it will not matter how much money you have or how many things you have or how many hours you have worked. What matters is how you have treated other people." Our Lord and Savior put it slightly different when He said, "Whatever you do to the least of these my brothers you do unto me." Stay ready to share a "touch of love" and be prepared for that sharing with others to touch you and change all you know.
Chapter 8: Kristine (Pee Wee)

I Peter 5:10
“The God of all grace . . . will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.”

We returned home after our meeting with Drs. Nadler and Kay. They had explained to Nana and me this Neiman-Pick disease and what Kristine’s future would be like. They admitted that a lot of what they were saying was “their best guess”, because, despite the fact that Dr. Nadler was the world’s leading expert on this disease, there were only 100 known cases in the world. We also made arrangements for your dad and Larry, who was now three weeks old, to be tested. They would not require a biopsy to find out if they too had Neiman-Pick disease or if they were free of it or if they were carriers, like Nana and me. A simple snip of skin from their backs would be sent off to a special lab in Washington D.C. A culture would be grown and tested. In a few weeks, we would know if they also had this disease. Nana already knew, but didn't say so.

As we drove home from the hospital that day, all I thought about was how we had been treated by the hospital staff, check-in to checkout. When I went to settle our account before we left, I asked why we hadn't been asked if we had insurance or the means to pay when Kristine was admitted. I was told it was because it didn't matter. If we could pay . . . fine. If not, that was fine too. The care would be the same. Almost every time we took Kristine for exams with Dr. Nadler, I thought about how lucky Nana and I were . . . lucky, not because Kristine had a three to five-year life expectancy, but because we could bring her home after the visit to the hospital. Most of the other children and parents we met weren’t so lucky. This was a hospital for kids with big time problems. Most of the time the patients that did go home would go home to Heaven. When you watch those home movies, you’ll see how we all looked that first day we came home.
My father died of a massive heart attack three days later. At the funeral home, when I was alone, I realized that I hadn't shed a tear for him, despite the fact that I was saddened by his death. I was all cried out - dry as a bone.

Two months went by, and we hadn't heard if your dad or Larry had Neiman-Pick. I started calling Dr. Kay every day from work. (I didn't want Nana to know how worried I was, so I didn't tell her I was making the calls.) Three days before the Christmas of 1972, Dr. Kay called me at the office with the results. I asked God to show me how to tell Nana. I walked into the house. I was early, and Nana knew something was wrong (mothers always know). I held Nana as I started to cry, trying to tell her that your dad was a carrier of the disease like us, but didn't have the disease. When I told her Larry had it, she looked at me through her tears and simply said, “I knew it.” Two out of 100, I thought to myself that day, some Christmas present. This is the closest I came to blaming God for our babies having this disease, but every time I would begin to blame Him or start feeling sorry for myself, through Grace, I was reminded of Dr. Perice’s words “God does not give anyone a cross too big to bear.” I’ve learned to add these words to her touch, “...not even His own Son!”

Day by day, week by week, month by month, Grace helped all of us live with Neiman-Pick. We had a church family that was very supportive. I began to help my mother through the death of my father, often wondering if sometimes she blamed me or our problems for his heart attack. I prayed she didn't. Nana and I decided that we would not try to have anymore children. We learned that our chances of having another child with Neiman-Pick was one in four. With two of our children already having it, we didn't think we could handle another Neiman-Pick child.

Nana and I have had only two or three real "disagreements" in the 34 years of marriage. Two of them, like the ones before we were married, were my fault. This one was no one's fault. We both wanted to have an operation; Nana insisted that she have it. She said that if she were to die before me, she wanted me to be able to have more children. She prevailed.

The year 1973 came and went. We had all the children baptized together that year. Sometime early in the year, we had a week-long Lay Witness Conference at church. The Sunday the conference ended, the congregation was asked to bring any burden or troubles in their lives to the altar. We were to lay them before God and turn them over to Him. We were to kneel and pray for as long as we wanted to. After we laid our burden upon the altar and finished our prayers, we were to take from the altar an aluminum cross with the words “God Loves You” engraved on it. This cross was to be a reminder of that “letting go to God” that day. The sanctuary was full. We were sitting with the Dickow Family. Nana and I were the first ones to our feet and walking to the altar. I'm sure every one was watching and giving us all the time we needed to be there alone.
As Nana and I took our crosses and returned to our seats, I can remember seeing the tears in the eyes of our friends, as they watched us return to our seats and they came forward.

1974 was to be another story! I had just finished an extensive training program during January, February, and most of March that required me to be gone 13 straight Friday nights and Saturdays. Nana and I had just returned home from spending some much-needed time together. We were celebrating her 29th birthday. We celebrated your dad's sixth birthday a week later. Less than a week after returning home, your Uncle Larry died and entered eternity on April 9th, 1974. Grace was there, albeit really well hidden. Picking a gravesite, choosing a casket for our child, standing in front of his casket in the chapel, and seeing our two children standing beside us almost took me to my knees. (I wished it had. I would have been stronger if I would have prayed.) Before I closed his casket, I placed that aluminum cross, which I had carried ever since that Sunday at church, in Larry's tiny, little hand. It was then that I realized I was not in control of the things that really count.

The next few weeks were one struggle after another, learning to grieve. Even though we were told Kristine's and Larry's life expectancy was three to five years, we weren't ready for death. You can't be taught to grieve from a book or by watching someone else do it. You can only wait for Grace to get you through it, to make the hurt stop hurting and the tears stop flowing, if only temporarily. You will be able to handle it because of Grace and those touches of love Grace places in your life in such unexpected ways.

One Saturday afternoon while I was cleaning the garage, the puppy we had kept from our golden retriever, Sandy (her one and only litter) came running to me. Nana and I were talking. She was standing in the doorway while I was sweeping with a big push broom. The puppy had messed in the garage, and I had just cleaned the mess before I started sweeping. As the puppy approached me to play, so happy and willingly, I exploded for no reason. Like a volcano erupts with no warning, I lashed out at the puppy. I swung the broom, hitting him in the side and killing him instantly. I looked at Nana, and I could see the shock on her face. I said to her, "We have got to find a problem we can solve". Nana was having more trouble than I was handling Larry's death, but she hadn't lashed out - - yet. Thank God your father or Kristine didn't see me do this horrible thing. I buried the puppy and went into the house and talked to Nana for a long time.

Just like the first day we were married, we made new plans that afternoon. We would move to Carthage, Missouri and start a new life. I would have to find a job and Nana would have to find new friends, new stores to buy things for the family, new doctors for all of us. That Sunday, we made our announcement in church. On Monday, I gave my notice at work and put the house we had built for our six children up for sale. That was in June of 1974. In October, I started a job with Leggett & Platt in Carthage, and we moved into our new home during
Thanksgiving. We had left a home that was almost three times the size of the one we were moving into. I wonder today, as I write this, what your dad, who was six, and Kristine, who was four, were thinking. Your dad asked me if we were poor now. Thank God Grace was there, bringing peace to each of us in God’s own way, in His own time.

Nana, your dad, Kristine, and I learned to live our new life. Normalcy came to me quicker than it did Nana, probably because of a new job that kept me challenged. Nana knew that Larry had Neiman-Pick long before anyone else. From the time we brought Kristine home from the hospital, she tried to put Larry back into her womb. She mothered him and suffered with him for months, as his little legs and feet were in braces to correct crooked legs, even though I believe she knew Larry would never walk on them. The normal needs of two children and a husband kept Nana going, until she could also return to a somewhat normal life . . . whatever that is after you bury your child.

Kristine was the one I was to protect and do anything for... anything, anytime. I sometimes think I kept myself from loving Larry too much as a defense mechanism, perhaps to block some of the pain that I knew was to come. (Nana, if I did, please forgive me for not being a complete father to Larry.) If I did that to Larry, God knows I didn’t with Kristine. She owned my heart and still does, and so do you, Noah. (So does your mom, dad, and Nana, but in a different way.) Many times I believe Kristine was sent here by God to teach me how to be human, kind, vulnerable, happy, unconditionally loving, honest, feeling, accepting, a servant, how to laugh and most of all selflessness.

God’s grace also sent Nana, your dad, Larry, and an army of other angels, some of whom I’m telling you about now, to shape my life. Can you believe how much God loves me? It started with His Son and continues today. I’m far from “shaped”, but so far Kristine has been His master potter. Grace and her touch of love gave this child, who would never be five feet tall or weigh more than 80 pounds, absolute and total control over me. I was and am her servant. Kristine said once, when I asked her to get something from the kitchen, “My parents were too poor to have slaves, so they had children”. She had it backwards. I loved being and continue to be enslaved to her and the touches of love she provided. You would have loved her and she you. I can imagine in my heart the two of you watching Veggie Tales, she on the corner of the couch and you sitting on the floor, just like your dad did when he was your age. I think you may have her laugh.
When Kristine was born, she had jet black hair. Several months later, when Nana washed her hair, it all fell out. She was bald. Your dad and I called her “cue ball” until her hair came in a most beautiful blonde. Nicknames always hurt her feelings, so Nana made sure your dad and I kept our use of them and our teasing in the spirit of good fun. Kristine always liked to have fun. She made everyone around her enjoy something simply because of the way she enjoyed it. My heart is so full of tears thinking of the hundreds of times she and I would fight and wrestle. As I write this, tears are starting to flow out of my eyes, as I think about the times I have played fight and wrestle with you. She loved to laugh and, when she did, everyone around her had to laugh too. Her joy was infectious and spread like a wild fire.

We all know how children, especially siblings, can be very mean to each other. As Kristine grew older, her "special belly" became even more noticeable, almost to the point of looking pregnant. She also became shorter and shorter than her classmates. (Stupid, insensitive me. That's probably why she didn't want me to call her Pee Wee in front of her friends.) Each time a new school year started, Nana usually had to explain Kristine's condition to her teachers. They would be told in detail what physical things Kristine would be allowed to do and what she couldn't. Most importantly, they were told to treat her as a normal student and to insist that she do her schoolwork. Nana is so strong; just one word from her would have made Kristine's schoolwork so much easier. This was one of the hardest things I dealt with. What a waste of her precious and limited time. Why would she ever need to learn all of this stuff? It was even harder because learning, especially math, didn't come easy to her, like it did to your dad. When she would come to me to check her math homework, most of the time I would have to explain that it was wrong, show her how to do it, and ask her to do it over. I could hear her start to cry, as she left the room, not because she had to do it again, but out of embarrassment and frustration. I hated myself. She and I should have been fighting and wrestling!

I don't believe Kristine was ever teased or mocked at school about her physical appearance. I think Grace had a lot to do with that, especially in junior high school, when she had to attend school with children from all over town. It wasn't like grade school, where she went to school with the same children for six years and the teachers were watchful over the young students. I'm sure no one wanted to face your dad either, which was more Grace.

No matter how much your dad and Kristine fought, hitting was never allowed, although Kristine would occasionally take a slap at your dad, but he couldn't hit back. I know he protected her against a lot of the meanness of childhood mockery. Sadly, there was nothing that Nana, your dad, I, or even Grace could do sometimes to protect her from the meanness of adults. She always noticed when people stared, and they stared at her a lot. Kristine's response was to remind us not to stare at someone else that was special when she would catch us doing it. She really knew how to “bust” you with her touch of love for others.
When will any of us learn to only look at others with the eyes of Jesus, like Kristine did?

Drs. Nadler and Kay told us during counseling to treat Kristine and Larry as if they were normal children. Nana did a better job of that than I did. Kristine’s teachers did an outstanding job too. I know they recognized she had to work harder to get a “C” than most of the students did to get “A’s”. I’m also sure that having your dad as a student two years earlier and knowing his ability, caused teachers to have high expectations of Kris. I don’t believe they ever gave her higher marks than she earned, except one time.

Kristine missed almost all of the last month of her 9th grade. She did her best to make up the work, and insisted on going to school the last day to pick up her grades and clean out her locker. So, we made arrangements for all her grades to be in the principal’s office. I helped her clean out her locker before school started, and we went to the office to pick up her grade envelopes. As we drove home, she couldn’t wait to open them. To her, it was Christmas in May. I made her wait until we got home, where she could open them one by one in front of Nana and me. She announced the subject and then her grade. When Kristine finished reading them all, she realized that she had received straight A’s. She was so happy and excited. I’m sure she had no idea why Nana and I were crying (as I am now). I know now that it was God’s grace and His plan to have Kristine attend school. I’m sure that Kristine’s special touches of love reached her teachers. I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of them for their touches of love placed on our Kristine and all of the thousands of lives that they continue to touch. I dedicate a portion of this book to them. May they always remember that they touch and that they have been empowered with these touches only through Grace. PLEASE USE THEM GENEROUSLY.

Christmas of 1984 was a one of those really memorable days (albeit they are too few) that came our way. Kristine loved presents anytime, but Christmas was really special to her, and it was her time to glow. She could hardly wait for the presents to go under the tree. Once they did, she would search through all of them and arrange them in sections - - a separate one for each of us. I think I can remember your dad mixing them up a time or two, after she had arranged them, just for fun. ('I'm sure you know all about his type of fun by now.) The anticipation was as much of a joy for her as the gift itself. It did not matter how expensive or big the gift; Kristine would get so excited and unbelievably happy. Strangely enough, your dad never seemed to, except once... this Christmas Day.

Nana and I had decided not to let your dad have his own car when he got his license. We could, unlike our parents, easily afford to get him one. He always had a part time job, so he could have taken care of the upkeep himself. Even though most of his friends had cars, he never... I mean never... complained. We knew that we would buy Kristine a car when she turned 16.
We also knew that when your dad went off to college the next fall, we would get him a car. We always tried to treat your dad and Kristine equally as best we could. Attention and chores were given to both of them in equal measure, except Kristine never had to clean the dog pens. On the other hand, your dad never had to fold clothes. On those cold and wet days, when your dad had to shovel dog poop into a wet bag that sometimes would be so full it would break, I'm sure he didn't see the equality.

Kristine helped us plan this Christmas that we decided to make special for your dad. She played her part so well that she should have received an Oscar for her performance that day. You see, she would get just as excited for someone else's surprises as she would her own, and that Christmas she never let your dad have a clue what was to happen. Christmas Eve, as we were returning home from church, I told every one that the garage door was broken and we'd have to use the front door. I set up the video camera on a tripod before we went to bed. The next morning, as we had done for years, we began to open our presents. As we started, I switched on the video camera and let it run. Kristine, as usual, was in charge of retrieving the presents from the sections she'd arranged. As she passed out the gifts (Nana first, Pops next, then your dad, and so on) the video camera recorded the morning. Your dad only received a shirt or two and a basketball. Someday when you watch that video, you'll see your dad bouncing this ball with greater and greater force (and perhaps anger) as he watches the three of us open one present after another. (That year there were all too many.) Pay attention to the look on his face when I ask him to go to the garage and get a garbage bag, so we can clean up all the wrapping paper and boxes. Then listen carefully to the next sound you hear. It will be your dad sobbing, as he opened the door to the garage. We took the camera to the door and recorded him getting into his brand new Camaro. (While we were at church, a friend had driven the car into the garage and placed a huge red ribbon on the top.) You will see him sitting behind the wheel, crying. We were too.

We knew Kristine would need a car when she went to high school, and the car would have to have some special fittings. Kristine couldn't wear a seat belt. Not that it wouldn't fit, but because, if she were ever in an accident, the seat belt would most likely puncture her liver or spleen and kill her. She would also need special extensions on the brake and gas pedals in order to reach them. That made it almost impossible for her to drive one of the family cars like your dad had done. Kristine would be 16 in a year, so we decided to get your dad a car while he was still in high school (more of that equality). I'll cherish forever the memory of the look on your dad's face, as he sat behind the wheel of that car with the massive red ribbon draped over it. He was reading a letter I had written and left for him in the car. The tears running down his cheeks sparkled like the streamers on that ribbon running down the windshield of the car. (Ask your dad someday if he kept that letter, I bet he did, unless Nana has it.) Within a few minutes, your dad took Kristine for a ride while Nana and I cleaned up. The joy and excitement that went all through Kristine's body that day and the days
leading up to it will also be very special to Nana and me. She went with me to buy the car and was involved in every detail that went into planning the surprise. She could not have been happier if it had been her own car.

January would bring the beginning of our worst nightmare. Nana took Kristine to her doctor for a check-up, which always required a blood sample. Kristine always hated that. When the doctor listened to Kristine's heart, concern and then panic covered his face. This doctor had seen Kristine about three times a year for several years. The results of each examination were always sent to Dr. Nadler and his staff, so that Kristine's Neiman-Pick disease could be monitored and recorded. Remember, we were told that she would have a life expectancy of three to five years . . . She was now 15. Most of the doctors, who were doing research on Neiman-Pick disease, could not believe what was written in her records. Those who examined her could not believe what they were seeing. I remember a doctor from Denver flew to Chicago to see Kristine because he could not believe from reading her records that she was as normal as she was. Kristine was about eight, and I'm sure she thought that this doctor was just being silly when he asked her to say the alphabet and walk a straight line, which she easily did, much to his surprise. All of the other children her age that the doctor knew of with Neiman-Pick were severely limited in their ability to answer questions and use their motor skills. Their ability to do the simplest of tasks was limited because of the swelling in the brain.

Neiman-Pick is the name of a disease that, as I understand it, doesn't allow the body to break down carbohydrates that are absorbed into the body. Those that aren't consumed normally are stored somewhere in the body. Kristine's were stored in her liver and spleen. In some children the excess wound up in the brain. We were told the disease itself was not a killer like cancer, but it would weaken the body in many ways, and something else would become the cause of death. Larry died of blood poisoning, and, like his sister, he didn't have a storage problem anywhere that we knew of other than his liver and spleen.

The doctor told Nana that Kristine's heart was in congestive failure, and that she would only live for another three months. He said that we should remove her from school, since she would be too weak to attend. Whatever else he told Nana that morning didn't matter or I’ve forgotten. After he spoke those first words, nothing else mattered. I was on a business trip when Nana called me in California; I came home as fast as I could. All the way home, I thought of Nana and how I was not with her when she had to hear those words from the doctor. I can't imagine how, but for God's grace, she could have driven home from Joplin with Kristine in the car. We called Dr. Nadler as soon as I got home. He couldn't believe what we were telling him; he hadn't heard of a Neiman-Pick child with congestive heart failure. The next day, he ordered certain tests, including an electrocardiogram (EKG), through our doctor in Joplin. When the tests were complete, he confirmed that Kristine had congestive heart failure. There was nothing he or anyone else could do to prevent it from taking Kristine's life.
When your dad was 14, he and I took our first big game hunting trip to Wyoming. During the drive out, I told him that his sister had Neiman-Pick.
As best as I could, I explained what that meant. I don't remember my exact words, as I explained the cause of his brother’s death and Kristine’s then current condition and the reason for her “special belly”, but I’ll never forget telling him. This was one of two times that I’ll always wonder if I should have said anything at all. (I’ll tell you about the other time shortly.) I can only take comfort in knowing that the same Grace that supported Nana and I was there for your dad, giving him the strength to hear and accept it, as well as the wisdom to handle knowing that his sister had the same disease that took his brother’s life.

We didn't tell your dad about the congestive heart failure or pull Kristine out of school. I told our mothers and a few people at work. We spent the next four months trying to live as normal as possible, crying and praying where Kristine and your dad couldn’t see or hear us. I worked very few hours and didn't travel during those months. I'm very grateful for the way our partners at L&P allowed Nana and I to have our time with Kristine, as well as the space we needed to cope with what was to come.

March came and went. In April, Nana and I started to believe that once again Kristine was going to prove the doctors wrong, but we soon found that we were wrong. By the first of May, Kristine became too weak to go to school anymore, but she insisted on doing her assignments. Graduating from 9th grade into high school was the most important thing to her. She did them all - - every stupid one of them. As I write these words, the anger toward myself returns; I could have and should have done something that would have prevented her from having to struggle with her studies. Grace held me back; God knew better than I did how important finishing the 9th grade was to Kristine.

I told you earlier that we never asked teachers to treat her any differently than the other children. On the last day of school, Kristine wanted to pick up her grades and clean out her locker. We went to school early to avoid the crowd. It didn't matter to Kristine that her legs were wrapped in gauze to absorb the fluid that oozed out of her pores or that she was so weak and sick of being sick. She wanted that locker cleaned out and to know if she had passed and would be in the 10th grade come September. I'm sure that by this time everyone in town, who knew of Kristine, knew of her condition. I wish that Kristine's teachers and all the other people that went out of their way to be grace to her could have shared the joy and renewed strength Kristine had when she opened her grade slips.

Kristine loved to be in the water where her special belly wouldn't get in her way; she could play for hours in a pool. The pools in our area don't open until the end of May, but Jim and Jean Hunter offered their private pool to us. They said we could use it any time, and we did almost every day. We would be there for a
few minutes or a couple of hours, depending on how Kristine felt. If they were home when we were there, they never let us know it, not because they didn't want to see us . . . They just knew how important this time was to us and knew we would get more out of it if we were alone. Before Kristine needed to be on oxygen full time, we would strap a small bottle of oxygen on a wheel chair. Nana and I would push that wheel chair the three blocks to the Hunter's pool almost daily. She never, despite being so weak, wanted to get out of the water. I offer my thanks to Jim and Jean and the grace of their sharing.

Despite grace, I still can't see a child in a wheel chair without crying . . . sometimes on the outside. Even knowing how much good they do for some people, I'll always hate the pain they bring to my heart as I remember pushing Kristine around in one.

The second week in June, our church received a new minister. I'm sure it's standard procedure for the outgoing minister to fill the new one in on "what's happening" in the congregation. His first day in Carthage brought him to our house. The first thing he said to Nana and I was, “Let's have prayer together.” Jay Proviance delivered the grace of peace to us that day in a great big dose. Every day for the next three weeks we prayed together. I feel bad now that we didn't have your dad with us during those prayer times, although we were praying for strength and acceptance for him too.

During that last month, Kristine would sometimes fall asleep every four or five hours and would wake up at all hours of the night. We never wanted her to awaken and be alone, so we installed an intercom between her bedroom and ours. We told her to buzz us when she woke up. During those times, we played a card game we called "smokem", and Kristine always won. I didn't let her, she just did . . . a small bit of grace. One evening, I decided I was going to win, so I removed the four aces and hid them under my pillow. In this game, if you had two or three aces you had all the power. I not only made sure I had all four, but that I could slip them into the game whenever I wanted. Imagine cheating your own daughter. You know what I learned that night, Noah? I learned that Grace can't be beaten; she won. After the game, we both laughed when I told her what I had done. I'm glad that evening brought us so much joy, and I smile through my tears every time I think of it. Kristine buzzed one night at 2:00 a.m. to ask if I wanted to play cards. As always I said, “Yes.” But, after that cheating incident, she always counted the aces before we started, laughing as she counted them out. I laughed too. Noah, as much as I love you and want only what is right for you, I can't promise I won't cheat in some game we may play someday, especially if it will result in the same laughter and memories for you. However, I do promise I'll always be honest about my cheating with you, as I was with Kristine that night.

I don't believe I worked five hours the entire month of June. I will always be thankful to Harry, Felix, Duane and Henry. They never asked, and I never had to explain. They, along with all my partners at work, will never know how much
their silent support meant to me - - then and now. I will also forever remember what Debbie Leggett did for me. She shielded me like an army of millions. Grace was everywhere.

On the morning of July 1st, after rubbing Kristine's back as she lay in bed, I went into the kitchen and told Nana and your dad that Kristine would die today. I don't know how I knew; I just knew that I knew. I believe it was the first time I told your dad just how sick she really was. I hope your dad has forgiven me for not telling him sooner. Nana and I were about to watch our second child die. He would see his sister die, knowing that some day he would be all alone. Your dad was just 17. Grace for him more than made up for my lack of sensitivity. I went back into Kristine's room and changed the gauze on her legs. Then, I asked your dad to go to her and spend whatever time he needed with his sister. I'd give anything to have heard what they said to each other.

While they spent their private time together, I went out on the deck, looked to Heaven and yelled at God, calling Him every name I could think of. I was on fire with anger and had to lash out at something or some one, just like I did with that puppy 11 years earlier. If God would have appeared at that moment, I believe I would have tried to kill Him too. Nana came out on the deck. She didn't say a word as she walked toward me. What courage. She knew what I was like when I lost control, and at that moment I was so lost and out of control only God could find me. He did so through Nana. Nana came close to me, took both my hands in hers, looked deep into my tear swollen eyes, and said "Not my will, but Thy will be done." A peace like I would know only once again flowed through Nana's hands, overcame the anger, and filled me. I knew God was right there with me. His strength would support us and allow us to face the day together. Kristine's best friend, Cindy, came by. After she left, Nana and I spent the next two hours with Kristine. She died while we were with her in her room. I will always regret telling her she was about to die. (This is the second thing I wish I had never said.) She must have been so scared. I've made so many mistakes, but Grace has allowed me to put them into Christ's hands and go on, despite the mistakes - - not because of them. He now carries those burdens for me. Kristine's last words were, "Help me." Until this moment, I had always thought she was talking to Nana and me. Grace just laid it upon my heart that she wasn't talking to us . . . She was talking to Jesus.

The day after Kristine died, Jay Proviance with the help of Grace, convinced us to set up the Kristine Marie Wells Scholarship Fund. Kristine had always wanted to be a teacher. Our house was full of friends trying to comfort us. The touch of love was everywhere, but I didn't want to be touched.

Harry and Doris Grenering came by and touched us (Nana first) with a book, Tracks of a Fellow Struggler. This book brought so much comfort to Nana. (I think she read it three times during our flight to Kenosha for the burial.)
I was sitting alone at our kitchen counter. Nana and our visitors were in the living room and family room. Jay came to me three times and told me that people were asking what they could do or give in memory of Kristine, and each time I rejected his suggestion. When he mentioned the scholarship fund, another touch of love helped me to see that Kristine’s touch to others could and would go on and on forever. That is why my heart fills with tears and joy when I hear the theme song from the movie, “Titanic”. Kristine’s heart will go on and on forever.

I had picked out Kristine’s casket two months before she died . . . a beautiful solid white. After she died, Nana, your dad and I took her to the funeral home, along with her favorite white dress. When the casket arrived at the cemetery in Kenosha, Nana, your dad and I opened it for one last look at Kristine. As we stood there, Nana opened her wallet and took out her cross from that Lay Witness Sunday of 13 years ago. She handed it to me to place in Kristine’s hand before I closed the lid. Kristine is buried in Kenosha, next to her brother Larry. Nana and I will be buried next to them. If you ever go there, you will find three grave markers that match. Larry’s says “OUR BABY.” Kristine’s says “OUR DAUGHTER.” Ours says “AND NOW WE WILL KNOW WHY.”
I was walking to work one day after lunch when we lived in Kenosha. As I passed the hospital parking lot, I noticed a man slumped over in his car. I knocked on his window, and asked if he all right. He was so still. At first, I thought he was dead. He looked up at me and said "My wife is ill, and I can't help her." We talked for a while and, when I knew he was okay, I walked on to work.

That was the beginning of one of the deepest friendships I've known. When I met Ed Chernik again it was at the Wells Company. He had come to buy a very well-used multi-spindle machine from us for his shop. We would continue to meet at the Wells Company over the next several months; he was doing sub-contract work and finding other sub-contractors for us. We were so busy, the entire factory staff was working between 50 and 60 hours per week. We couldn't keep up with the orders. Over the next five or six years, he would come to see me at work. (He never called; he just showed up.) No matter how busy or behind I was, a touch of love would make the time for us to be together. We would have lunch, and he would tell me about his life. I was fascinated and inspired by the reality of these stories and by his ability to bring them to life. I felt that it was like living and learning from his life's lessons as they happened. They were always full of promise and hope. Eddie didn't know "down" . . . only "up". His cup was never half empty; it was always half full.

Eddie (that's what your dad and Kristine called him) used to say he was as old as the calendar. He was born in Austria and immigrated to America in 1909. The more we were together, the more we liked and loved each other. One day, I invited him to have dinner with our family when his wife, Mary, was away.
For Kristine and Eddie it was love at first sight; he didn't know about her Neiman Pick disease. They played like kids until it was time to eat. Nana liked him because Kristine took to him so fast. Kristine and your dad were his only focus when he was with them... not the television or Nana or me... Eddie knew what really mattered. For several years to come, he would be the grandfather your dad and Kristine never had. Before I go on, I want to say that, while I watched him spend time with our children, I learned a lot about being a grandfather for you, Noah.

When Eddie's wife died, he was lost. He had four children, three of whom lived within ten miles of his house. I knew he felt lonely, even though he never said so. Eddie and his wife didn't have a church life that I know of. After sitting with him at his house, listening to him tell me of his almost 40 years of marriage, while his children were in his bedroom dividing his wife's war bonds and things, I asked him if he believed in God. I think he was the first person I posed this question to. Perhaps because of the awkward way I may have asked the question, he avoided it and started to talk about something else.

Now that he was alone, we invited him over more and more. We all became a regular part of each other's lives. We both wanted nothing from each other except each other's company. We invited him to attend church with us in 1972 or 1973. At first, he was uncomfortable, but after awhile he fit right in and became a part of other church member's lives too. I can remember several afternoons at the Dickow's pool when they, not us, would invite Ed. At church, he always sat next to Kristine and listened to every word of the sermon. Sometimes we would discuss the sermon at lunch after church. Eddie spent almost all of the holidays with us before we moved. I don't think his children cared, although I wished they would have.

We moved to Carthage just before Thanksgiving in 1974. I believe that was the only Thanksgiving or Christmas he would not spend with us until Kristine died. As you watch our home movies, you will recognize Eddie right away. Pay attention to the love and intelligence in his eyes, not the fact that he was missing a few front teeth or that he almost always needed a shave.

Nana was like a daughter to Eddie. She always took the time to pick out nice clothes as presents for Christmas and his birthday. I think these were the only new clothes he would get throughout the year. Nana always took good care of
his sweet tooth and fixed his favorite meals. One year she also bought him a plaque that read, "The only difference between stumbling blocks and stepping stones is the way you use them." After Eddie died, I asked his children if we could have it back; I'm very grateful they said yes. Ask Nana to show it to you, along with the picture of us the Christmas we gave it to Eddie. I pray that your dad will want them both when Nana and I have gone home.

We asked Eddie to move down to Carthage. Being apart was hard on him and us. We all missed him and what he brought into our lives. Regretfully, he decided to stay in Kenosha. Maybe he thought we were trying to get him and Nana's mother together; at least we would all tease each other about it. I believe the real reason was that he didn't want to be a burden. He would spend about four to eight weeks a year in Carthage, and I never went to Kenosha without seeing him. Many nights I would sleep at his house. That's a whole other story I'll tell you sometime.

Eddie, like Lala and Nana, showed me how to love unconditionally with the way he loved Nana, me, your dad, and Kristine. I never knew Eddie to smoke, drink, say a bad word, or tell a lie. He was among the most intelligent, street-smart people I've known. His appearance or his lifestyle didn't beam of success (junky cars full of junk, old machinery and lift trucks all around his home). He died with probably less than $10,000 to his name, yet I think of him as one of the wealthiest and most successful men I will ever know. He told me he had been a millionaire four times and lost it all each time. He owned machine shops that could do work no one else could do, and he was a full professor of engineering at Northwestern University at one time in his career. Eddie told me that he'd had over 100 different jobs over the years that he had left "to see the rest of the show". He told me about most of them and of moving his family and starting over so many times.

Once, we had to take Kristine to Detroit to see Dr. Nadler for her annual check-up. We decided to ask Eddie to join us. While we were there, we visited the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village. I can't wait to take you there too. When we go, I'll try to repeat as many of Eddie's stories as I can remember him telling me that day. His life spanned countless technological changes, most of which are artfully displayed in the Ford Museum. The second day I had to rent a wheel chair for Eddie. He was worn out from the first day, but he wasn't too tired to continue telling his stories. We all took turns pushing him around Greenfield Village.

Eddie died in 1988. He was never quite the same after Kristine died. He was there when we buried her, and I think a lot of him was buried with her that day. Over the next three years, Eddie became very forgetful, yet he was sharp enough to know it. It really bothered him. He never returned to Carthage, but I spent several nights at his house. Sometimes I would sleep on his couch; sometimes he would sleep on the couch and give me his bed.
I have never felt closer to Eddie than when his children asked me to speak during the visitation at the funeral home. No minister . . . just me to say goodbye to Eddie. I told his children and the few friends that were there how I believed that he was a true Christian and a servant of our Lord. He didn't wear his Christianity so everyone could see it . . . he lived it. His love and the time he gave to my family and others told chapter and verse of being a Christian. What appeared on the outside to the unknowing eye was nothing like the gentle touch of love that was in almost everything he said and did. I am capable of loving you and others so much better because of the way Eddie taught me by example to love and, just like Lala, to look for something good in everything and everybody.
Chapter 10:
Your Mom and Dad

I Peter 1:13
“Set your hope upon the grace that is coming to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

No story about the touch of love, as we have referred to grace in these stories, would be complete without talking about how Nana and I have been touched by your mom and dad. They will have their own stories to tell you (and perhaps your brothers and sisters.) I'll not try to tell their stories for them; that's theirs to do.

I want to start by saying that if God would have allowed me to pick a son, and choose how he would grow, learn, and become a man, I couldn't have done a better job than God did. I love your dad more than any other person (my love for Nana is different, remember). I'm so proud of him that there are no words to describe how I feel. Yet, sometimes (perhaps most of the time) I don't treat him that way. What kind of touch is that? God, why do I treat the ones I love the most that way? Do other people do that? We should all know better. Forgive me, Spunk.

I wrote your dad a letter for his high school graduation present. If he has it, ask him to share it with you. If not, maybe he can remember it and tell you about it. I pray it meant as much to him, as it did to me. The following year, as he left for his second year in college, I gave him the book, One Year Through the Bible. As he drove off, I prayed that he would rediscover Jesus Christ in those pages. He had some questioning times in his freshman year. Who could blame him, considering everything he'd lost and the way he saw his parents suffer. He had to wonder if there was a God. I was worried, but your Nana never had a doubt. I wasn't sure until Nana and I went to see "Raiders of the Lost Ark". At the end of the movie, the hero had to make a life saving choice between several chalices, trying to pick the one Christ had used at The Last Supper. After the choice was made, the action and music really picked up when the actor chose the right one that saved his life. Nana whispered in my ear, and I started to cry. From that point, I don't know how the movie ended.
I have the video, and someday you and I can watch it all the way through to the end. Nana and your dad had seen the movie a week earlier and, as the actor looked from one beautiful chalice to the next, your dad picked the right one. I, on the other hand, had completely missed the point of the chalices. Your dad saw the connection immediately. He chose the right one, because it was the simplest one . . . the one Christ would have chosen. His heart was where Christ’s would have been.

I don’t know if he ever finished One Year Through The Bible, but I do know that Christ is alive and working in his life (your mom’s too). When I look at you praying to Jesus and listened to you sing “Happy Birthday” to Jesus at our Christmas dinner, I know He is at the center of your family’s life.

Noah, I have told you how I lied to my mother, my father, my brother, my sister and many of my friends as I was growing up. Thankfully, I believe, because of Nana’s touch of love, Tom and Kristine did not inherit the lying gene from me (if there is such a thing). When your dad was 12 and Kristine was 10, Nana and I sat down with them one evening and made a deal that went something like this: “We want both of you children to always tell the truth no matter the consequences.”

Your father gave me many opportunities to be proud of him . . . becoming an Eagle Scout . . . being a leading scorer and rebounder on his basketball team . . . graduating from college and receiving an MBA. But, one of my proudest memories of your father is when he stepped forward and admitted he had done something wrong at school. He accepted his punishment, which included not being able to participate in extra-curricular activities. There were 13 to 15 other boys that were involved, but only your dad had the courage to step forward and admit it when asked. I’m so glad we made this deal with your dad and Kristine. Nana and I may not have always liked what we heard, but we always knew it was the truth. (There is more to this story, and I hope your dad will tell you about it someday.) This is an unbelievable comfort when you’re a parent to know your children are telling you the truth. How I wish my mom and dad had known that comfort. The touch of truth is very touching.

When your mom first walked into our life with your dad, just before Thanksgiving in 1992, I felt like God was giving me back another daughter.
I don't need to tell you about her or how lucky you are to have her as your mother. By the time you can read this, you will already know that better than I could tell you with words. What I do want to say is that your mother is blessed with her own special touch of love. It pours out of every square inch of her, as I watch her hold you, teach you, and even when she says “no” to her Noah. She has been blessed with that touch of love called motherhood and, from what I see, in her own way, she is doing just as good a job as Nana did in her way. Yes, they both have different ways of mothering; that's the way God wants it.

Your mother, has given me some of the most heart warming gifts I’ve ever received, like the book *When the Last Acorn Is Found* or the Christmas Nail that hangs at the base of our Christmas tree each year. I cherish those gifts as much as the cards your dad and Kristine gave me for Christmas. In fact, I felt so blessed by these two gifts from her that I have given many as gifts to my friends. Your mother’s touch has touched many lives. I don't thank God often enough for her. THANK YOU, GOD.
Chapter 11: Touches

Vera

Hebrews 4:16
"With confidence draw near to the throne of grace and find grace to help in time of need.”

Everyone should be so blessed as to have a Vera in their life. I know I have been, even though I don't thank God or Vera enough. Your Nana has my heart; I promised it to her until death do us part. Vera also has a special place in my heart that is reserved for your best of friends - - friends that you can share anything with and you know they will still love you unconditionally. Friends like Vera, like Eddie, like Christ, know you as you are, love you anyway, and are always trying to help you become what you can be.

As a friend, Vera has helped me try to fulfill my potential in life. For over 13 years she has been many things to me, including a friend.

?? A spiritual mentor, always challenging me to know Christ in a different way.
?? A person to talk to, willing to listen and answer, many times knowing it wouldn't be the answer I wanted.
?? Willing to take far less than her share of the credit for countless jobs well done.
?? Making sure that I have gotten far more than my share of the credit.
?? Ready to give her time, her support, and her understanding.
?? Willing to do what I didn't want to do (and in one case couldn't).
?? Willing to trust me when she needed someone to talk to or lean on.
When Debbie Leggett, my secretary, decided to stay home to care for her child instead of continuing to work, I struggled over the next couple years to find the support I needed. As I was preparing to go through yet another interview, Vera came into my office; we were introduced. Our office manager, Jane, thought Vera was "Mrs. Right" and wanted me to meet her. I'm not any good with interviews, and don't know the right questions to ask. Vera was dressed very professionally and extended her hand with such confidence, as she said, "Hello, my name is Vera." I knew then we had to give her the job, but I had to ask one question of her "How do you feel about doing personal work?" She answered, "That's fine, as long as you're not an ogre about it." I didn't know what an ogre was, so I asked. She answered, "It's an !@$#^&$##." I said, "You're hired." The first day we worked together, we went to my bank and added her name to the signature cards for all our accounts. I have never looked at a bank statement, checked her work or been disappointed with the trust I have placed in her. That was the start to a touch of love that continues to touch.

What is between Vera and me, for the most part, is hers to tell as she wishes. I told you that she makes sure I get more than my share of the credit. Let me give you an example. The book, Tracks of a Fellow Struggler, that brought so much comfort to Nana and me after Kristine died, went out of print. We had probably given away 100 copies of that book by that time, and Vera knew how much it meant to me to be able to help someone else who was suffering and struggling, as we did. Vera, with permission from the author, took our last copy of the book and typed it into her computer, so I could continue to share this comforting story with others. Because of her caring . . . not just for me, but for others she will never know that are hurting . . . she has provided a touch of love.
John 1:16
“From His fullness we have all received grace upon grace.”

Noah, Larry was a special touch of love, just as John Cline and Mr. Isserman were, at just that right time in a life that was in need of a touch. Remember me saying that His timing is always perfect, they are not coincidences, merely Him involved in our lives … “Godincidences.”

In 1963 or 64, I met Larry for the first time. I would have never thought that eight years later we would name our third child after him. At 4:00 in the morning, I was awakened by the sound of gravel hitting the window next to my bed. (The same window that was shattered by a tree branch.) You can imagine how that sound startled me. When I looked outside, I saw it was my father and another man doing the throwing, not just another storm. When they saw that I was awake, they yelled out, “Will you fix us some breakfast?” I let them in the pro shop. It was obvious they had been up all night. Now, they wanted to eat before they tried to play a round of golf. I was introduced to Larry. My dad explained that he worked for the Steadley Company in Carthage, Missouri, and he was a good customer of the Wells Company. I made them breakfast, and, at daylight, watched them tee off. As they drove away, I was hoping their golf cart would break down at the furthest point from the pro shop and they would have to carry their clubs back to the clubhouse.

The next time I met Larry, I was at work at the Wells Company, sitting at a drill press. Someone kicked my chair. When I turned to see who it was, Larry said, “I don’t ever want to see you working at a drill press again. You have more important things to do.” I had worked at Wells for some time and knew a little about the company Larry worked for.
I had been told stories about him; he was somewhat of a legend. My first two meetings (encounters) with Larry were an awakening, but I couldn’t see the legend . . . yet.

Over the next three years, I worked on several experimental projects, as well as service tasks, that gave me the opportunity to spend a lot of time with Larry. I learned a great deal from him. Larry is easy to like and love, but almost impossible to understand or predict. I won’t spend a lot of time telling you “Larry” stories; there are just too many, but I will tell you one that I will always love Larry for. I would wish for you a “Larry” to love and guide you as he did me.

When our son Larry died, Larry and his wife were of great comfort to Nana and me. Larry was also there to help me when I began working for L&P. I am very thankful for those unselfish touches from Larry. I will always love him and think of him, as I live my life and do my work. One of Larry’s most precious touches was when he took responsibility for making sure Kristine’s coffin was handled properly by Ozark Airlines, as they transported her body from Joplin to Milwaukee. He booked a seat for himself on that plane just to make sure the transfer to a connecting flight in St. Louis was made properly. He also made sure that the people from the funeral home met the plane and Kristine arrived at the cemetery on time. Although I didn’t thank him at the time, I want to tell everyone that this unselfish act of kindness exemplifies what friendship is all about . . . to help someone in need with that something special that only they could do . . . whatever it is. We will all be in need at one time or another. Being a friend without being asked and doing what is needed, regardless of the cost, is what life, love and friendship is all about.

I love you, Larry. Trust that I’ll pass on what you have given me. THANK YOU!
A Touch of Love

Kathy

Ephesians 2:8  “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”

I met Kathy Cui in 1996 when Philip Shen and I visited our new Shanghai facility we had rented three or four months earlier. Philip introduced me to Kathy, our only Shanghai employee at the time, and left for another meeting. We were to meet later that night. Kathy was to be my guide and translator. It was only after Philip left that I discovered Kathy was just as much a stranger in Shanghai as I was. It was December and very, very cold. I was wearing silk long-johns under my wool suit, a lined topcoat and gloves. I walked out into what would someday be our factory and started thinking, planning and dreaming of what it could someday be, what our company could do for China and what China could mean for Leggett & Platt. When I became so cold I couldn’t stand it anymore, I walked back into the office that was nearly just as cold. The little space heater would have done almost as much good if it were unplugged. I looked around at four bare walls. There was no heat and only two electrical outlets. Kathy had a pot of hot water and the pathetic space heater plugged into one and a computer plugged into the other. (What a contrast in technologies!) Kathy was eating some soup she must have warmed with the space heater. She offered me some tea, and I sat down on a box close to the heater. I left my coat and gloves on and drank my tea. After Kathy finished her soup, I began asking her questions.

“How long have you worked for Leggett & Platt?” “Four or five months.,” she answered. “How did you come to work for us?” She told me that her father had met Philip a year earlier at a trade show. He was a small furniture manufacturer in Inner Mongolia and wanted his daughter to work for an American company. At that time, our office was in Beijing, so Kathy traveled there for an interview, was hired and moved to Beijing. Shortly after, we decided to move our office to Shanghai. Kathy moved again. I thought what courage she must have to move to a strange city . . . twice. Relocating to a new place is hard for anyone, but in China it is a challenge beyond description. Imagine moving to towns of ten and thirteen million people, not knowing a soul, trying to find housing, and finding transportation to work. (Kathy, like most in China, doesn’t have a car.)
That’s okay . . . she doesn’t know how to drive either.) Now, imagine doing this twice within a short period of time. What courage! What strength and self-assurance it must have taken to overcome such high hurdles.

Kathy made arrangements for a taxi, and we headed for downtown Shanghai. On the way, we stopped by her apartment so she could get something. As the driver drove down a trash-covered road (it might have been paved at one time, but now it was a sea of pot holes filled with garbage), I began to imagine Kristine having to live like this, just starting her career . . . She would have been about the same age as Kathy. The area, for as far as you could see, was filled with 15-story, unpainted buildings. Each one contained about ten small apartments on each floor, and each apartment had a small, recessed balcony that was covered with rusty, steel bars. What amazed me most was that even the balconies on the top floor were covered with these steel bars. Even the most desperate thief couldn’t get up that high and, even if he could, I doubt anyone in these buildings had anything worth stealing. I didn’t feel good about Kathy living here.

It was so cold, there weren’t many people outside. Those that were, seemed to have a purpose and an objective, with no time or energy to waste. While waiting, I decided to get out and walk around. What a stir I caused with the few people that were outside. I was probably the only Westerner to walk down this street (alley). As I walked, I looked into the one window each apartment had facing the alley. (The only other window was on the balcony.) Behind the windows and on the balconies were plants, laundry hung on bamboo poles, and all kinds of junk. Through the windows, I could see that the apartments were lit with a single bare light bulb, there was little or no furniture, and the walls appeared to be the same unpainted concrete as the outside walls. By this time, I was almost 100 yards from the taxi when Kathy walked up and asked if I was ready to go. As I walked back, that small voice inside me that I know is the Holy Spirit took over my side of the conversation for the next hour.

I asked Kathy if her father knew what kind of place she was living in. Kathy did not hesitate with her answer. She said, “No.” She had lied to him, describing her new home much differently than it was. She didn’t want her parents to worry or send money they didn’t have. What courage to have no money and no friends, but be so selfless as to refuse asking for help from the only two people in a country of 1.2 billion that could and would help her. As we got back into the taxi, I thought a lie is a lie, but there was one heck of a difference between the lies I had told my parents and the lies Kathy was telling her’s. I almost began to cry as I thought again about Kristine having to live this way.

I asked Kathy if she felt safe. When she said, “No.”, I told her she was moving today, and she could get her things tomorrow. Tonight she would stay in the hotel near our factory. She tried to refuse my “offer”. This was not an offer; there were no options. I insisted the driver take us to the hotel.
I explained to Kathy that Philip and I had been there that morning to look at an apartment to house our technicians when they came to train their Chinese partners. I rented a small apartment for Kathy ... one with its own bathroom. I made arrangements with Sunny, our technician from Guangzhou, to help Kathy move the next day.

Back in the taxi and heading for the central district of Shanghai, I asked Kathy where she got her name. She explained that most Chinese with Western names were given them by their English teachers. When Kathy told me that she learned English at a type of missionary school, the wee little voice inside prompted me to ask if she knew Jesus Christ. I'll never forget her answer. “I know him in my mind, but not in my heart.” Without asking if she was interested in learning more about Jesus, I took my from my briefcase a New Testament that a loving Christian Brother, Bruce Vaughn, had given me.
I (we – the Holy Spirit and I) directed her to a few stories about Jesus, and asked her to read them that night. I told her we would talk more, and I would try to answer any questions she might have.

We spent the rest of the day sightseeing and shopping, while Philip was at the attorney's office. Among my purchases was a hot water heater for Kathy's new apartment. For reasons I will never understand, the apartment complex furnished a stove and refrigerator, but not a hot water heater. Kathy objected to each and every offer to help, until I explained that I wouldn't sleep knowing my daughter was living where she did or going without hot water. I told her that Kristine was dead, and I could do no more for her, but I could and would do for someone else's daughter. She relented.

That was the beginning of seeing a person come to Jesus Christ. Over the next two years, I saw Kathy several times during my trips to China. We would talk about Jesus and the stories in the Bible, which Kathy was reading regularly. In between my trips, Vera began to encourage and witness to Kathy by phone, fax and E-mail. Kathy explained how difficult it was to understand the Bible I had given her, partially because it was in English. I gave her enough money to purchase five New Testaments in Chinese at the nearest Christian bookstore. Kathy finally found them through a church miles away. Someone from the church would deliver them to the restaurant that night. After that, Jesus became more real to Kathy. Vera and Lillian, a new person at the office and strong believer, began to bring the living Jesus into Kathy's daily life.

In 1998, Kathy came to Carthage as a translator for a group of our customers from China. I asked her before she arrived if she was ready to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior, and if she would like to be baptized. If she would, Vera or I could try to arrange it. My minister, Rusty Maggard, agreed to interview Kathy and, if she was ready, he would baptize her. When the day arrived, we asked Kathy if she wanted to be alone or if she wanted a few of us there with her. (Vera and I were hoping that she would want us there.)
What courage! Her first concern had to be what if this minister, whom she’d never met, refused to baptize her? Knowing the possibility existed, she allowed us to be there anyway. We waited in the sanctuary while she met with Rusty in his office. About 30 minutes later, they came in together. Without saying a word to us, they walked directly to the baptismal font, and Rusty began the service. Your father, Aunt Kristine, and your Uncle Larry were all baptized together when your dad was four years old. Theirs, along with yours, are undoubtedly among the most beautiful moments I have ever witnessed in a church. When I watched Kathy kneel before God and Rusty, I saw beauty and the touch of love as never before. This was the first time I was to see an adult coming to Jesus Christ. There, in the weakest of all positions, on her knees, you could see the power and grace of Jesus fall upon and flow through her. I wept as I remembered Jesus’ last words on the cross, “It is finished.” Now, for Kathy, her old life truly was finished. No matter where she went or what happened to her, she would never be alone. Jesus Christ had baptized her heart by placing within it His special version of a touch of love . . . His gift to all that ask him: the Holy Spirit.
Almost all I know about work, the business world, and dealing in it, I owe to four men: my dad, John DeSantis, Larry Higgins, and Harry Cornell. There are many others, like your other Grandfather Felix, for whom I give thanks. I'll never forget his “welcome back home” handwritten note, just after I was about to do something very stupid. (That's a long story for me to tell you on a slow fishing day when we are in a boat together.)

I met Harry Cornell in 1972. During our first lunch together, he asked me what it would take for L&P to be the best at operating the new Wells transfer system. To this day, he has not stopped challenging me (and countless others) to give 110%, 120% of the time, do whatever it takes to get the job done, cover all the bases, leave no stone unturned, and use our God given talents to the fullest. He has always made sure that very common people, like me, were motivated and guided to achieve uncommon results.

I know full well that Harry is just a man, with his share of weaknesses and flaws. But, I also know (although he wouldn't want me to say this) he is a very deep, living, serving, and sharing Christian. Harry has touched me with love so many times in so many ways . . . sometimes with his heart and sometimes with his foot. These touches could not have come from anything but the heart of a friend or, in some cases, that of a father.

If someone ever asks how a high school graduate, without one hour of college credit, could be named on over 50 patents, promoted to a vice-president and officer of a Fortune 500 company, and contribute to the success of Leggett & Platt, tell them God and Harry deserve the credit . . . not Pops. I credit them both for also showing me the way and teaching me how to share it with others.

Thank you, God, for this incredible touch of love . . . and, thank you, Harry.
When Kristine died, I built a mile high, mile thick wall around my heart. I didn’t want Nana or your dad to be able to get out and, more importantly, I didn’t want anyone, especially a little girl, to ever get in. At the time, it made sense to me that, if you shut out the love, you would avoid most of the pain that comes with the joy of loving. Noah, I was wrong . . . not about the pain of love; I was wrong about the wall.

You were born in January of 1998 and no wall, no matter how high or thick, could ever keep you out. One smile or hug from you would have made that wall disappear like magic, but you didn’t get the chance . . . someone else did it for you. In October of 1998, we spent time with a family from Italy, along with your mom and dad. When we invited them, we didn’t know they would bring their daughter, Chiara. We were surprised to see her when we met at the airport, but within 48 hours this little girl had brought the wall crashing down as if she were Sampson himself. She could only speak a few words of English, but she spoke volumes of love.

In less than a week, this seven year old had my heart . . . in many ways like Kristine did. The next summer, Chiara agreed to spend six weeks with Nana and me. (Of course, we had her parents blessing even before we asked Chiara.) Those six weeks taught me a lot, some of which I knew but had forgotten or refused to remember . . . like how to play with a child and how to let a child play and not be in a hurry to do something else. The most important gift Chiara’s touch gave was to remind me of the joy in loving a child and the completeness that comes from having a child love you and tell you so. I had forgotten how good those feelings were when your dad, Kristine and Larry, as children, shared their love with me years ago.
The Smelly Old Lady

II Corinthians 1:12
“Not by Earthly wisdom but by the grace of God.”

Noah, I have mentioned several times in this story about the Holy Spirit, a constant companion and friend given to us by Jesus. This gift and grace, Christ's touch of love are free . . . not because we found them, not because we deserve them, and certainly not, because we worked for them. Christ is the only one that can give them away, because He alone paid for us on the cross. I've told you that I have never known a time in my life when Christ wasn't with me (I can remember too many times when I wasn't with Him) and I've never had any problem understanding who God is, but I didn't have a clue about the Holy Spirit. Guess I didn't get it in confirmation class.

Let me tell you two stories about the Holy Spirit, both of which took place while I was on an airplane. One story tells how the Holy Spirit became real to me; the other story tells how the Holy Spirit was able to use me . . . in spite of myself.

Years ago, I boarded a plane that was overbooked. To make matters worse, I had been assigned a middle seat. As you know, I don’t fit well in a middle seat. The flight was delayed and the longer I sat there, the more I disliked the men on either side of me, the flight attendants, the airline, and everyone else that came in sight. Of course, my lack of space, having no arm rests, and being too fat to fit in a middle seat wasn’t their fault, but this did nothing to relieve my anger. I sat there feeling sorry for myself, getting madder and madder by the minute. I began to think that I was hearing a voice in my head telling me to read my Bible. After hearing these words several times, I spread out my arms, pushing both gentlemen on each side of me, and bent over to reach my briefcase under the seat in front of me.

By the time I had my Bible in my hands, the plane had taken off, the flight attendants were serving dinner, and there was no chance to escape to the back of the plane where I could stand in comfort. I opened my Bible to where I had left off from my last reading. I came to these words, contained in John, Chapter 20. “He breathed on them, and said to them ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Immediately after reading these words, I yelled “Eureka.”
Everyone within 30 feet must have been wondering what this nut was going to
do or say next. The gentlemen on either side of me would have bailed to the
floor if they could have gotten there or anywhere else to get away from me.
I can’t remember ever using that word before (other than in the telling of this
story), and I haven’t used it since. However, it is the word that came out of my
mouth, as I expressed the joy that had overtaken me. I was no longer the guest
of honor at a pity party. I was overjoyed. At that very moment, I was finally
able to make the physical connection between God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy
Spirit. It had always been easy for me to visualize the connection between God
in Heaven and God incarnate in the form of Jesus Christ, but I never could
visualize how the Holy Spirit was connected. Immediately after reading these
words, I was able to physically connect the Holy Spirit to God through the
breath of our savior. I have come to know the Holy Spirit as Christ’s second gift
to us. (The first of course, was going to the cross.)

I would like to tell you yet another airplane story that I have shared with my
Sunday school class. One of those students, two or three years after
graduating from high school, came back to Carthage and attended my class
when I happened to tell this story again. When I finished, John asked me to
write it down. He said that he had learned a lot from it and, if it was written
down, perhaps others could enjoy and learn from it too. I have entitled it, “If You
Think You Have Problems, Ask The Smelly Old Lady In The Pink & Gray Warm-
up Suit”.

I left Carthage at 4:00 a.m. on a clear, cold morning to catch a 6:00 a.m. flight
from Springfield to St. Louis. In St. Louis I would connect to another flight to
Boston. When we took off in Springfield (I had an aisle seat), the sky was clear
blue, with the most beautiful sunrise I could remember, as we approached St.
Louis. When we landed, I looked out the window and was amazed to see two
feet of snow everywhere, except on the runway. Evidently, St. Louis had been
hit hard by a storm the day and night before, which never touched Carthage or
Springfield. My connecting flight was scheduled for a delay of at least three
hours, but it was anyone’s guess when the plane would actually take off. The
longer I waited, the madder I got; I was ready to rip someone’s head off.

I could have easily postponed my trip by one day and avoided this storm that
had shut down a majority of the Eastern half of the United States. Rather than
being stuck here, I could have been in my office being productive. Instead, I
had to sit in this crowded airport, waiting to board this stupid plane. Boy, did
somebody owe me something! Finally, they called the flight and I managed to
get a bulkhead aisle seat with the only empty seat next to it. I had my space
and was prepared to spread out and work. Well, just the moment before the
door closed, two people helped a heavy-set lady in a pink and gray warm-up
suit board the plane. Guess where she sat? You got it … in MY spare seat!!
They closed the door, backed the plane up 50 feet and stopped the engines.
No “Eureka” this time!
I was absolutely beside myself when the pilot came on the intercom and announced that we were experiencing an air traffic control problem, and we would be sitting there for at least 90 minutes. Now, this little old lady, who had done absolutely nothing to me, was the target of all my anger. Not only did she have the nerve to occupy my extra seat that only I was entitled to, but this lady smelled so unbelievably bad. This pink and gray warm-up suit was taking up my space and completely! occupying my sense of smell as well. No extra space to work and no one to talk to. After all, she stunk; what could we possibly have in common to discuss?

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see she was having trouble buckling her seatbelt, but I didn’t even consider offering to help her. The bad weather and this woman, who lacked the common sense to bathe, had ruined my day; why should I help her? Then that same quiet voice returned once again; “Offer to help her.” What ensued was a silent debate inside my head between the voice and me. I am sure it didn’t last longer than a couple of seconds, yet it seemed much longer. Well, as you would guess, the voice won. I asked her if I could help her; she said, “No.” Good, I thought, now I can go back to feeling sorry for myself and ignore her. Then the voice came back and said, “Ask her again.” A much shorter debate took place and, once again, I lost. “Would you like some help with your seatbelt?” “No,” she replied. I thought surely the voice was finished with me now; I had asked twice and twice she had declined. Well, the voice knew I could do more, and told me to ask once again. I did and to my disappointment she said, “Yes.” I extended the belt, untwisted it, and buckled it around her. No thanks were given – not a word. I was relieved to feel that our relationship was over, but the voice knew better. I received my instructions from the voice and asked, “Are you okay?” No response. Prodded by the voice, I asked again. This time, she took a deep breath, sighed and said, “No.” Now I felt like I had just opened a can of worms, only I didn’t feel like fishing. Be honest, how many times do we ask people how they are feeling just to be polite, and hope they say, “Just fine.” We don’t really want to hear their problems; we just want to be nice. This wasn’t one of those times. In fact, I wasn’t being nice or polite. I was merely doing as I was told. But, there was the voice again, so I asked, “Can I help?”

Her story began the day before. This lady and her husband had left Dallas for Boston to spend time with her daughter, who was dying of brain cancer. When they reached St. Louis, the storm had closed the airport. This old, confused couple, who were on their way to Boston to spend the last hours of their daughter’s life with her, were now alone, stuck in an airport. She told me that as they sat there, her husband had a massive heart attack and died immediately. Imagine this lady, with very little money, in the middle of the airport with thousands of people passing by thinking only of themselves and how the weather has botched up their plans. She had no one or nowhere to turn, and no one was turning to her.
When help arrived, you can only imagine the chaos and the people staring. They took her husband to a hospital, pronounced him dead, and called a funeral home. This old lady in the pink and gray warm-up suit had been up all night filling out forms and making arrangements with the funeral home. She made her way back to the airport and called her daughter’s home to check on her condition. Her granddaughter answered. She told her that her mother had died about an hour ago. That was several hours ago, and she had been sitting in the airport waiting to go to Boston to help make funeral arrangements for her daughter. The longer she talked the less she smelled. When she finished her story there wouldn’t have been anything I wouldn’t have done for her. At that moment, I felt as close to her as I would my own mother. I asked her if she knew Jesus Christ in her heart. Without hesitation she said, “Yes”, showing the first glimpse of emotion she had shown since she sat down. I asked her if her daughter had known Jesus Christ; she smiled and said, “Yes.” She went on for quite some time, with a Christian mother’s pride, describing how her daughter loved the Lord and was at peace with her cancer and her fate. For the next hour, we continued to talk about our families. I told her about our son, Tom, and our two children in Heaven.

Then I asked her if her husband had accepted Jesus Christ. The joy left her face, as she told me that she didn’t think so. She told me about seeing him watch a TV preacher a couple of times, but he had never told her he had accepted Christ as his savior.

It had been over two hours since she had boarded the plane. I had forgotten that we were sitting there waiting to take off. Finally, the engines started and, before we were 20 feet off of the ground, she was asleep with her head on my shoulder. As we landed in Boston, I woke her up and helped her off the plane. I offered to give her a ride anywhere she needed to go, but her granddaughter was there to meet her. We hugged and said goodbye, never knowing each other’s name … but we sure got to know each other’s heart.

I am very thankful that the smelly old lady in the pink and gray warm-up suit came into my life. I love that voice. I am learning to debate less and do as I am told sooner. I can not wait to thank Jesus Christ personally, when I meet him, for the gift of his voice. I pray we will always keep our hearts and minds open and ready to hear the voice and respond to the call.

Romans 15:15 “I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given to me by God.”
Chapter 12:
As We Finish Together

Isaiah 40: 29-31
“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.’

Noah, these pages have taken you through most of the years of my life lived without you. Just as your father, Kristine, and Larry entered our lives (Nana’s and mine), you’re a part of our future as we finish and will once again change all we know. You are truly an unbelievable touch of love, living grace for sure.

I have tried to teach you (and, of course, your brothers or sisters) the real meaning of grace through a life lived because of and through grace. I hope that you don’t think for one second that:

?? I didn’t receive my fair share.
?? I received more than someone should.
?? Nana didn’t receive her share (I leave to Nana, and rightfully so, her stories to share with you when and as she sees fit.)
?? Anyone else received less than the exact amount of Grace they required at the time we were being touched.
That’s not to say any of us wanted or thought we needed that touch of love every time we were blessed with one. Unfortunately, I have to admit that most of the time when I was touched, I wasn’t as thankful or happy as I should have been. It’s all too easy to attend a pity party when you are the guest of honor. Most of the time, I didn’t think I was touched (slapped or slugged maybe). More often than not my reactions were more along the lines of “too little too late”, “too much too soon”, or “later, God, I’m not ready.” But, even worse was when I did not recognize a touch for what it was . . . an unmerited and undeserved gift from God. Instead of being thankful, I questioned, resisted and gave myself far too much credit for the good that happened in my life. Noah, the good news is that I have learned not to question or resist. I’ve learned to acknowledge with thanks where credit is due.

In 1995, almost 10 years to the day that Kristine died, I was very grateful to have learned (and always will be) the lessons of His touch of love and what I thought I knew was and is always changing.

Your dad and I were going to fly to British Columbia to fish with Malcolm Marcus (who is another touch I can’t wait for you to meet) and his son, Adam. We had planned the trip for almost a year. Two days before we were to leave, Nana began to get a sore throat and called Dr. Edwards’ office for some medicine. Touches took over. Dr. Edwards wouldn’t prescribe anything without seeing Nana, so she went to his office.

That night, when I got home, Nana said that I needed to call Dr. Edwards at home. Dr. Edwards said that Nana’ heart was in congestive failure. He had run tests that day. (She never called me at work; can you believe that?) Dr. Edwards arranged for Dr. Moore to see Nana the next day. He said that if we didn’t do something Nana would not live out the year. Touch #1.

The next day, we went to Dr. Moore’s office. Nana had played tennis years earlier with his wife. Dr. Moore and I had attended a Camino Weekend together, but I hadn’t seen him since and didn’t know if he would remember me. When Dr. Moore met us in one of his waiting rooms, Nana was sitting on the examining table and I was in a chair. As we got up to introduce ourselves, he came toward me smiling and said, “I remember you.” Then he hugged me. He turned to Nana, taking both her hands, and said, “WE are going to get you through this.”

He said “WE” in such a way that we both knew the “WE” he was talking about. He asked us to join hands with him. He told us that God had placed skill in his hands and knowledge and wisdom in his head. Then we prayed together. Touch #2.

After several tests in his office that confirmed what Dr. Edwards had told him, he wheeled Nana through an underground tunnel that ran between his office building directly into the hospital. He asked his assistant, Rob, to call for a room, which was ready for Nana by the time they got there. He stayed with us
for over an hour. Before he left for his office, he made sure everything that
could be done for Nana, was done. Nana knew she wanted him to be her
doctor. The surgery would be done in Joplin, and she wanted Dr. Graham to be
her surgeon.
Nana's lungs were full of fluid because of her heart problems, and she spent 11
days in the hospital just getting her strength back, as they got the fluid out of her
body. Noah, when Dr. Edwards had told her about her problem 12 days earlier,
she had asked him if this was something that could wait or if it could be taken
care of while your dad and I were fishing. You see, she felt good and had been
working out at the "Y" almost every day. Even though she knew exactly how
serious congestive heart failure was, she didn't want to see us cancel our trip
because of her.

Nana came home for another week of rest before the surgery. Your mom and
dad came home from Minneapolis to be with us. Nana was at peace almost
from the time Dr. Edwards had given her the news . . . I wasn't. Neither one of
us expected her to live through the surgery. Her heart was enlarged because
her mitral valve had been damaged for years from Rheumatic Fever she had as
a child. I would begin each morning at the hospital with Nana, stay for an hour,
and go to work. I wasn't capable of doing much at the office. The first night
Nana spent at the hospital and I was at home without her really got to me. A
friend called. He knew how I felt. Ten minutes later, he was sitting with me in
the kitchen under the single light that was on. Nana always had the house lit
up, and I didn't want them on without her there. We talked for an hour (thank
you, Jay). I went to bed without Nana, thinking that it might be that way forever.

After another day and night like the last one and finding that the office couldn't
keep my mind occupied, I decided to go home and cut the grass. This time I
didn't yell at God. This time I was praying for peace and strength for Nana and I
to accept and live by "Thy will be done". I knew my prayer had been answered
for Nana, yet I was going crazy. I just couldn't dispel the thought of having the
one I love more than any other, my best friend, die from the same thing that
killed our daughter 10 years ago.

It was unusually hot. As I cut the grass, I began to cry, as I prayed for us.
I sweated and cried to the point that my cheeks felt like they were under water.
While I was praying, that voice I knew and loved interrupted my prayer telling
me, "The victory has been won. If she dies, she will be with Christ. If she lives,
Christ will be with her." That peace that had passed through Nana's hands and
washed over me ten years ago was now bathing me again. My tears were now
tears of joy for both Nana and me. For the remainder of the first hospital stay
and the week we spent together before the surgery, Nana and I made the most
of our time. We had fun and laughed together. We cried and prayed together.
We were at peace for each other. Touch #3.
This time it wouldn’t be three strikes and you’re out. I walked with Nana as they
pushed her toward the operating room. She was sedated, but still awake when
we reached the point in the hall where she would turn into the operating room
and I would have to go into the waiting room. I stopped the gurney, bent over,
told Nana I loved her and kissed her. Dr. Graham was in the hallway as I was
asking a nurse if Nana could take with her what I was holding in my hand. I
knew she couldn’t wear it as a necklace; her chest would be opened up and her
heart would be laid upon it, as they replaced one valve and repaired another.
Dr. Graham spoke up and said, “Yes.” The nurse took the pocket piece and
taped it to Nana’s leg. It was a silver Celtic cross with the words “Thy Will Be
Done and the sign of a fish stamped on it. The same words Nana told me ten
years earlier, which gave me the strength and peace to go on after Kristine
died, would now be with Nana throughout the five hours of surgery and two
days of intensive care.
I believe Nana still has that cross; perhaps she will give it to you one day.

So, Noah, that is grace . . . sometimes easy to see and many times well hidden.
In either case, it’s a touch of love from God Himself.

As I write these last few
words, I now know that
your mother is carrying
another child. You will
have a little brother or sister
this fall. The touch of love
just keeps on touching. All
I know is that the touch of
love changes all that I
thought I knew . . . except
for one thing: God loves
you, God loves me, God
loves each of us equally
and His grace is sufficient
for each of us.

MAY HIS PEACE BE WITH YOU NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.

Matthew 11: 28-30 “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are
heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you,
and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall
find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is
light.”
If this book has touched you in a special way, please consider contributing to the Kristine Marie Wells Scholarship Fund. All donations may be sent to:

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