

A scenic view of a lake and mountains framed by trees. The foreground is a dark, shadowed area with some dry leaves and grass. The middle ground shows a sandy beach leading to a calm blue lake. In the background, there are green mountains under a blue sky with some clouds. The title text is overlaid on the upper part of the image.

God's Timing Not Mine

Kym Miller

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Dedication



This book is dedicated to the God who created all things visible and invisible, animate and inanimate, who is also the Sustainer of all His creation, Redeemer of mankind, and Saviour to anyone who will accept His gift of eternal life. Thank You, God, for Your loving-kindness, watchfulness, and care all my life, even during the times when I was rejecting and denying You.

Preface



This book is about real people, events, and places; however, to preserve the anonymity of those still alive and for their protection, the names of people and places have been changed. The main character I have named Alice. Alice's trust in God can be seen throughout this book, but it became stronger the tougher her life became.

Alice is a Christian who gladly shares her faith with anyone interested but never pushes it on them. She lives by a standard that she believes God expects of her, but she does not expect anyone else to live by her standard. Some of her religious beliefs are presented in this book so that you may gain an understanding of why she made some of the decisions she did.

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Chapter 1

Alice



By an invisible hand, doors open and close throughout our entire lives. All of us find ourselves at one time or another staring at a closed door with deep longing to be back where we were or banging on it trying to get back in. Most of the time, we do not succeed in reopening a closed door, but on the rare occasion that we do, we usually regret doing so in the future. At other times, we find ourselves staring into an open doorway not sure if we should or if we have the courage to step through it and into the unknown. For reasons which are hard to explain, most of us feel safer with the known present no matter how bad it is, rather than the unknown. Then again we can simply find ourselves standing in a hallway just watching and waiting for a door to open.

Alice believes it is the hand of God that opens or closes these doors in our lives. God created mankind with a free will to choose, so even though He opens and closes doors for us, we don't have to go through the open one and can sometimes open a closed one. As God knows everything from the beginning right through to the end, His will and ways are far different from our ways, but if we knew what He knows, we would not choose a

different path for our lives. God also opens and closes doors in His own time, not ours, and sometimes when we least expect it.

Believing in God's will and ways is how Alice was brought up in Australia as a Christian since her earliest days. Coming from a very musical family, Alice learnt from childhood to sing many choruses and hymns, which even today she loves dearly. One that she really loves and believes fits in with the theme of this story is called "God Will Take Care of You". She knows of two very different versions of this song: one written by Fanny Crosby (1820–1915) and another by C. D. Martin. These are the words written by Fanny Crosby:

God will take care of you, be not afraid;
He is your safeguard through sunshine and shade;
Tenderly watching and keeping His own,
He will not leave you to wander alone.

Refrain

God will take care of you still to the end;
Oh, What a Father, Redeemer, and Friend!
Jesus will answer whenever you call;
He will take care of you, trust Him for all.

God will take care of you, through all the day,
Shielding your footsteps, directing your way;
He is your Shepherd, Protector and Guide.
Leading His children where still waters glide.

God will take care of you long as you live,
Granting you blessings no other can give;
He will take care of you when time is past,
Safe to His kingdom will bring you at last.

Some people question why so many Christians seem to be going through such tough times when they read words like these. Should not a Christian have it easy? No, God never promised an easy life but rather quite the opposite:

Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. (2 Timothy 3:12)

That being said, God also has promised “that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)

He has also promised, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it*” (1 Corinthians 10:13 author’s italics).

This book about a portion of Alice’s life is not so much about all the hardships and strife in it, although some of these things will be included too, but it is more about how she saw God’s timing and how He worked in and through her life. As Christ commissioned the healed madman from the country of the Gadarenes:

Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee. (Matthew 5:19)

So Alice was very glad to tell what God had done for her.

Chapter 2

Christian Faith



The Seventh-day Adventist faith is the one that Alice most closely aligns herself to, although she is not a member of any denomination. This chapter is all about Alice's beliefs and values, which were the main reasons why she stayed so long in her marriage.

Two of her beliefs are that the Godhead includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and that the husband is the head of the wife like Christ is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23–25, 1 Corinthians 11:3). This is not a head as in a dictatorship although this is what happens in a lot of cases and Alice's was no exception. However, a biblical head leads by loving example just like Jesus Christ led and taught His disciples and does for His church today.

In writing about how God created man and woman equal, Ellen White, a deceased Seventh-day Adventist, states in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 3, page 484:

When God created Eve, He designed that she should possess neither inferiority nor superiority to the man, but that in all things she should be his equal. The holy pair

were to have no interest independent of each other; and yet each had an individuality in thinking and acting. But after Eve's sin, as she was first in the transgression, the Lord told her that Adam should rule over her. She was to be in subjection to her husband, and this was a part of the curse. In many cases the curse has made the lot of woman very grievous and her life a burden. The superiority which God has given man he has abused in many respects by exercising arbitrary power.

Sanctity of marriage is another firm belief of Alice and that marriage is for as long as you both live. According to what Jesus said in Matthew 5:32, the only reason for divorce is fornication. However, separating from a violent partner or non-believing one who no longer wished to be married to you is allowed (1 Corinthians 7:12–15).

To complain about one's partner is to complain about oneself, was something Alice had been taught and believed. This belief was due to the Bible instruction that the two people in a marriage had been joined as one in holy matrimony. Not only this, but despite hardships, troubles, and strife that may arise within a marriage, the couple should never think that their union was an error or regret it.

Another strong belief that Alice had is that we should live as peacefully as possible with all men and that Jesus pronounced a blessing on the peacemakers in the Sermon on the Mount (Romans 12:18, Matthew 5:9). For these reasons, she would do nearly anything to avoid a controversy or argument. If she asked someone a question and they gave her an answer that Alice knew was not the whole truth, she would give them the opportunity to give the full answer, then drop the subject to try and maintain peace. However, in doing this, many things dropped from her sight without proper investigation—things that never made any sense but which later did after she found out the truth about what was going on behind her back in her own home and beyond.

Some advice that Alice's mother-in-law had passed on years before was something that she had been given about her marriage was if you find yourself complaining all the time about your marriage, stop complaining, and either put up with your life and lot as it is or leave. This also had a

bearing on Alice's decisions and the support or lack thereof she could expect to have should she leave her husband, Tom.

There was also a common saying which Alice felt fitted her situation quite well—it is better the devil you know than the one you don't. In other words, it is easier and simpler to put up with someone she knew despite how bad they were because if she left, she might find and become involved with someone far worse.

Every time something went wrong during her married life, all these beliefs, instructions, and sayings ran through Alice's head. Loyalty to God was a strong attribute that Alice had, and this was also transferred by her beliefs to being loyal and supportive of Tom.

Chapter 3

Not a Bed of Roses



For a very long time, Alice knew that the way Tom was treating her and their children was not right, but because of her beliefs, she felt like she could not do anything about it or talk to anyone. When she did pluck up the courage to tell a couple of people some of what was happening, they did not realise just how bad things really were and told her to stop whingeing about nothing or that she had made her bed so she had better lie in it.

As a young girl and teenager in the seventies and eighties, Alice had seen and heard about a lot of domestic violence, e.g. men sharpening kitchen knives while telling their wife and children to go to bed; wives being left battered and bruised from the beating they endured for minor errors; men in an absolute rage yelling, shouting, cursing, and swearing at their wife or children or both, for some minor offence; and husbands spending all the money, leaving the wives and children hungry and unable to pay the bills. She had seen her Aunty Dora endure, with such grace and patience, severe abuse from her husband and who had a very tough life.

Aunty Dora and her husband had owned a house but sold it for one that was not as up to date facility-wise. It only had cold running water and

plumbing for the bathtub. Hot water was boiled in a copper in the laundry and carted in buckets to wherever it was needed. The kitchen sink had a bucket under it to catch the water when the plug was pulled, which overflowed into the cupboard when someone forgot to empty it before they pulled the plug. The wash basin was just that, a basin in the bathroom with water in it that you could wash your hands and face in, but the water was only changed once or twice a day. They had an old wood stove for most of the cooking and a little two element and grill electric one, which was rarely used. The washing was done in an old wringer washing machine, and they had a very smelly outhouse for a toilet. Alice often wondered how her aunty could live like this and determined that she would have it better.

Yet for most of her married life, Alice only ever had cold running water; hot water was usually obtained from a two-litre electric jug. The drain plumbing was poorly done, if done at all, and the water tank often ran out of water. For over seven years, she never had a flushable toilet, only getting one when Alice dug the hole for the septic tank through the ground that was nearly as tough as concrete. This was never a priority for Tom as he had shower and toilet facilities at work, which he used. They also had an old wood stove to do most of the cooking on and an old wringer washing machine for the laundry. As Alice was going through all this, she did not realise that her life nearly duplicated that of her aunty which she vowed it never would.

Tom often lectured Alice and the children about wasting water and how it had to stop. Tom always blamed them for the tank running out of water so quickly. This often puzzled Alice as she knew she did not waste water and made sure she supervised the children well when they used it. However, one day as they were going out, Alice noticed the front tap was constantly dripping water. She tried to turn it off only to find the washer needed replacing. A little later on, she had to look under the house for something that had rolled under there and found water pipes constantly dripping. When she challenged Tom about these water wasters, he retorted that he could not fix everything! Despite this, Alice and the children were still blamed for wasting all the water.

In hindsight, Alice can see that her and Tom's problems went right back to the beginning of their relationship. They lived together for about three years before deciding to marry, which is when the problems really started to stand out to Alice. A few months before their wedding, they went

shopping. Tom and Alice wanted to buy a new tent for camping and were going to price some. They looked around and found one they really liked and that suited their needs. They also found a fly-screen tent for day use, which they would have found really handy. Tom picked them up and headed to the checkout to buy them. Alice asked him if they had enough money to buy them at that time. He reassured her that they did and also told her not to make such a fuss in the shop as it was embarrassing. Outside Alice asked where the money had come from as the only spare money she knew they had were savings for their wedding. Tom then informed her that he had just spent most of their wedding money, but that he would make it up over the next few building jobs that he worked on.

A week or so later, Tom's boss ran out of building jobs and had trouble finding new contracts. It was going to be a couple of months before Tom had work again. This was nothing new and generally was not a problem. However, with the wedding fast approaching and Tom having spent most of the money saved for their wedding, it became an issue. No matter how hard Alice worked on and tried to alter the budget, there just was not enough money for the wedding. This meant that their wedding, which had been planned for over six months, would have to be cancelled. Alice phoned her dad, crying as she told him what had happened. As you can imagine, he was not very impressed with Tom, but he told Alice not to worry because he would make up the difference. Alice thanked her dad for coming to the rescue in this situation and never forgot his kindness.

This was by no means the end of the drama surrounding their wedding, only the beginning. Alice and Tom had to travel over a couple thousand kilometres to her dad's place where they had decided to marry. They intended to drive their car down to their wedding, but only weeks before they were to leave, the car broke down. Tom, who did all their mechanical repairs, said there was no way it could be fixed in time. So Alice sought out other ways to make the trip. First she priced hire cars and airfares, but they were too expensive. Finally she managed to book them on a bus, only managing to get them to arrive a few days before the wedding. When the bus arrived at their stop to pick them up, the driver told them there were no seats for them as they had not confirmed their booking. They told him that the travel agent said she had done that when they made the booking a couple of days prior. Alice then went on to explain to him how they were travelling to their own wedding. So the driver squeezed

them in the seat right behind him, which was very small, and moved them further back in the bus when there was room. Somehow everything seemed to work out, but looking back, Alice wonders if someone was trying to tell her not to marry this man. Maybe what she was really doing was trying to bash down doors that were closing or had been closed.

There were several other fiascos with money like their wedding one. After living together for a while, Alice decided that she would pay for the bills, and that way, she knew they were being paid. She had often been stressed out by discovering that Tom had not paid them when he was supposed to and said he had when disconnection or demand letters arrived. From his pay, Tom would supply the extra stuff. Alice believes this is what he wanted all along because despite having hundreds of dollars to spare every month, it all seemed to disappear. Over time, Tom became more and more agitated each time Alice asked for money to buy something that was needed. Eventually, it came to the point that she only asked for money to buy something if it was vital that she or the children have it.

When Alice left work to start a family, times became really tough as money was very short. Tom and Alice moved into a caravan on a block of land about sixty kilometres out of Katherine. A camping canvas shower bag was filled with water and hung in a tree for showers, and their toilet was a porta-potty in a garden shed. Slowly over the next seven years, things improved a bit as Tom added to the caravan a galvanised iron annex, which he extended several times. Although one of these additions included a bathroom and toilet, the porta-potty, which had broken with use, was used for six and a half years.

Money was tight, but Tom always demanded that whatever spare money they had should be given to him, but Alice made sure she kept enough to cover the bills. She often went without things she needed just to give him this money. However, having very little money to live on never stopped Tom from bringing home more and more animals, all of which needed to be fed and cared for. Tom also ran up his credit card to thousands of dollars twice, buying lots of unnecessary things like junk food after throwing away the lunch Alice had made and packed for him. When Alice finished paying off his credit card the second time, she cut it into pieces and told him if he applied for another one, she would do the same thing to that one too. Tom knew she would do this as she collected the mail.

While Tom was working at a school, Alice was approached by the canteen lady. She told Alice that Tom had run up a \$300 bill with the canteen and Tom had told her to come to Alice for payment. Alice told her point-blank that she did not have that kind of money to give her and that if Tom wanted anything from the canteen he should pay cash for it or the food should not be given to him. Alice also told her that Tom could pay his own bill out of his money and that the children and she were not going to go without things they needed just because of his undisciplined appetite.

One evening, Alice went out to a meeting and arranged for Tom to look after their two young children. Their evening meal was prepared and cooling on the bench. All he had to do was set the table and put the plates in front of the children. Then when they had finished eating, put them to bed. When Alice arrived home, the children's evening meal was mostly still on the plates in the fridge. To her horror, Tom told her that he had put the children to bed but that the older child had been very naughty sneaking out of bed to steal food, and he had hit her repeatedly for it. Alice was so angry with him that he had made their children go to bed without any food that she nearly woke the children up yelling at him. He just shrugged his shoulders and walked away saying that he did not hear her properly and thought they had been offered their food and refused it. Needless to say, Alice never trusted Tom to look after the young children again.

Another time, some people came to stay with Tom and Alice to help run some religious meetings for their church. Another church member lent them a vehicle so that all their family plus their visitors could attend the meetings. This was a very gracious offer and very much appreciated by Alice. On the day Tom was supposed to return the vehicle to the other church member, Alice gave him money to fill the vehicle up with fuel. Sometime later, this person came up to Alice and abruptly said he thought they would have at least returned the vehicle with a full tank of fuel like it was given. Alice was so stunned by this comment that she could not say anything. Later she asked Tom why he did not put the fuel in the borrowed vehicle. He replied that he wanted to buy something and the other people had more money than themselves, so it didn't matter.

Using the Internet, Alice had taught herself how to fix computers to help them save money. Tom used this to his advantage, trying to get into other people's good books by offering her services. Often he would make the arrangements to fix someone's computer, drive the whole family to the

people's place, then left Alice to care for the children while trying to fix the computer. During this time, he would talk or argue with the people getting cross with Alice if she interrupted to acquire information she needed to fix the computer. A few times people asked her if Tom had passed on the money they gave him for doing the work, but she never received it.

One day Tom needed fairly major surgery. Their car was not very economical, and they now lived about forty kilometres out of Nambour, where Tom was to have his surgery. So they agreed that Alice would drop him off for the surgery and pick him up when he was ready to be released from hospital. On the way home from dropping him off at the hospital, a friend flagged Alice down. She was holding \$10 which she said was for fixing her computer. She said she wanted to make sure Alice received it, so she waited until she saw her. Alice thanked her kindly. The next two days, she received phone calls from Tom demanding that she come in and give him a massage as he was in so much pain with his back and the nurses wouldn't help him. The \$10 was exactly what she needed to help her get enough fuel to do all the trips. Alice believes God was showing her that He cared about her and her family and was providing for them before they knew that they would need it.

Another time, Alice needed medical treatment but had to travel over 100 kilometres to receive it. She also needed to have several hundred dollars saved to pay for upfront costs for the treatment, some of which would be refunded later. Alice asked Tom if he could help pay for the fuel as finding that amount of money was really difficult. He told her that if she wanted the treatment, she would have to find the money because he did not have any. Alice borrowed from Peter, James, John, and Matthew (figuratively speaking) just to raise the necessary funds. On the way to receive this medical treatment, Tom stopped less than three kilometres from their home to buy \$30 worth of junk food. Alice asked him why he could not have put that money towards the fuel, to which he replied that if he had done so, he would not have been able to buy this food—anyway she had found enough money without his.

Unfortunately, Alice's medical treatment resulted in her requiring day surgery in the hospital where the other treatment was given. This time, Alice worked everything out the best she could without asking Tom for money. All seemed to go well. It was around 8 p.m. when the staff finally

told her that she could go home. Alice phoned Tom and told him she was ready to be picked up. He said he would come as quickly as he could. Two hours later, he arrived complaining that he had only just put the children to sleep, so he had to wake and dress them before coming for her. As they were leaving the hospital, Tom was holding Alice by the hand and was nearly dragging her as he was walking quickly. Walking so quickly really hurt Alice due to the surgery she had that day. She told him that she had to slow down. He became very cross with her, saying they had to hurry out to the car because he had left their children, aged eleven and nine, out there alone. Alice could not believe that he would leave their two children alone in a car at that time of night, let alone expect her to nearly run after surgery!

Several days later was shopping day. Although Alice was still on strong painkillers from the operation, Tom refused to do the shopping. So Alice had to go with him and the children to town, walking around doing all the shopping. Apart from the general groceries, Tom and Alice wanted to change banks, which he demanded they do that day. However, Tom refused to move the car, making her walk a considerable distance up and down hills. Alice had to rest several times on the way to the bank and was exhausted when she arrived. Tom spoke to the gentleman at the desk, telling him what they wanted, and then turned to Alice for the paperwork which she was carrying. Alice nearly passed out due to the pain she was in. The gentleman quickly found a chair for her and helped her sit down. He would come over to her for any paperwork he needed as Tom refused to do so. When they were leaving, the gentleman insisted that Alice sit on a seat outside the bank while Tom walked back to bring the car. This was a very kind gesture which Alice appreciated very much but didn't like the abuse she copped from Tom for agreeing to it—how dare she make him walk back to bring the car to her, he had health problems too!

Several years prior to Alice leaving Tom, she was diagnosed with chronic fatigue (CF) and multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS) allergies, which made life quite difficult not only for her but their entire family and any visitors. Simple things like soap, shampoo, deodorant, and the like had to be changed. Many other things had to be eliminated altogether. Alice's diet also had to be radically altered due to food allergies and intolerances. Some of her allergies were very severe, and the worst of them would cause anaphylactic shock. The doctors had supplied Alice with an EpiPen (a pen-

like injection apparatus that had adrenaline in it) that she was to carry everywhere with her. Yet she was often told by Tom that there was nothing wrong with her and that it was all psychological. This was his usual diagnosis for many of her or Sally's serious health problems.

Tom's inconsiderate attitude about health and well-being was displayed not only to Alice but to the children too. When their daughter, Sally, was about twelve years old, she went for a bike ride with her brother, Arnold, before school. Sally accidentally hit a large bump in the road and came off her bike. She had cuts, gravel rash, and scratches up one leg and knee, both arms, and her face. When Sally and Arnold eventually made it home, Alice hurriedly cleaned her up as best she could and then the whole family went to the doctor as Alice felt that the cuts on Sally's face should be stitched. The doctor disagreed and told them to go straight home and clean her up some more and she should be OK. However, Tom did not want to waste the fuel into town just for their daughter and wanted to visit some second-hand stores to look for some things he wanted. Alice protested, but as Tom was driving and had the car keys, there was nothing she could do. In a lot of pain and with bleeding sores, Sally had to wait in the hot car till her father was ready to take them all home. During this time, the cuts on her face dried out and opened up. Sally ended up with two very nasty scars in a very prominent place on her face—scars she will carry for the rest of her life.

Another time, Sally was very sick when Alice arose out of bed. Sally had pain across her back and down her left arm and in her chest. She had tried to wake Alice hours earlier but could not, so she had waited until Alice woke up. Sally explained how she had told Tom already but that he did not care or do anything. Alice was having a major allergy and had just taken an antihistamine, which made her very unsteady on her feet and fuzzy in the head. She yelled out for Tom to phone for an ambulance. Just then there was a phone call from a friend. Tom talked and talked and talked. After about half an hour, Alice, furious and frustrated, staggered to his office door where he had taken the call and yelled loud enough for the person on the other end of the phone to hear, something to the affect, "Get off that bloody phone call to your friend and call for an ambulance. Your daughter has had a heart attack and has been waiting far too long already!" The friend was horrified and hung up on him, but he refused to phone for an ambulance, saying he did not know how to do so. What a shocking

admission for someone in their fifties. This meant, despite how ill she was, Alice had to phone for an ambulance as well as travel with Sally to hospital. Sally had indeed had a heart attack and had heart-related problems ever since that day.

Arnold needed braces on his teeth and was placed on a waiting list at the local hospital. His appointment finally came up, and Alice took him in, paying for the fuel as usual. The dentist explained what he would do and how there would be regular appointments which were to be attended by at least one of Arnold's parents. After a while of Alice taking their son to these regular appointments, Tom offered to take him, which also meant that he would pay for the fuel. Alice was so relieved at the offer of help that she accepted it. Some weeks later, she asked Tom how the appointments were going. He told her he had no idea. He said he laid the car seat back and rested in the car while Arnold went up by himself. Shocked, Alice told him that one of them were supposed to attend each appointment. He told her there was no way he was going to do that, and he was taking their son to the appointments now, so just forget it.

According to Tom everything had to be done as a family or not at all. This, of course, excluded anything Tom wanted to do by himself. It was nothing for him to go out nearly daily to visit friends and neighbours while the children completed their schoolwork under Alice's supervision. Tom also took several trips away, some for a couple of weeks, leaving the children and Alice at home to care for all the animals. For the rest of the family, the children and Alice, if one of them needed to see a doctor, dentist, any other treatment, or just the grocery shopping, everyone had to go. As the children were homeschooled, it would have been quite simple for Tom to look after the children, or at least the ones not needing to go, while Alice took the one that did. Plus he usually point-blank refused to take the children to any appointments. However, Tom refused to help in this way, making catch-up with schoolwork a common thing. Also when Alice was attending doctor's appointments, Tom would go so far as to refuse to look after the children while she went into the doctor's office, making some treatments impossible.

While out shopping, Alice would often be asked if the children were sick or why they were not at school. They were innocent questions being asked out of curiosity. She would simply tell the person that they were homeschooled and how they did their schoolwork at other times. This

made Tom extremely angry and accused those people of being extremely nosy or spies for the government. As the children grew older and bigger, another problem arose on shopping day—how were they going to fit all the shopping plus all of them in the small car? For quite a while, there were groceries between the children on the back seat, on the floor at their feet, and on the passenger's front floor of the car, while the boot was carefully packed to capacity. Eventually, Tom conceded and let Sally stay home, which helped considerably.

Tom had been very dictatorial and restrictive towards Alice and their children for most of the marriage, demanding that the children and Alice do as they were told and not follow his example. Her family and her friends were pushed away, while his family and friends were embraced and presented as that of the whole family. After each contact with Alice's friends or family, Tom would ridicule and demean them and what they said to her in front of their children. Alice felt sick every time he did so.

Making or breaking a promise for Tom was something he did at the drop of a hat to absolutely anyone. However, if Alice or the children said they might do something, they were expected to do it, even if they were extremely ill. If people outside the immediate family did not do as they promised, Tom would degrade their name to everyone he met for weeks, demeaning their name terribly and sometimes ending the friendship. Many times, he made the children help him around the home, making them break their promises to go out and help elderly neighbours and take the blame for it themselves.

Tom enjoyed chatting on Christian Internet forums or chat sessions and would abuse people who thought or believed differently to himself without giving any scriptural reference as to why he thought he was right—he was simply giving his opinion and expected others to believe it. Also after a phone call, Tom would often break into a tirade about how someone was demon-possessed because they laughed at something he said to them on the phone. To Tom, anyone who laughed was demon-possessed, even young children.

Tom's father had very little education and used to repair things to the best of his ability; however, Tom had been in the building industry for many years and had been trained to do everything from the foundation to second fix. One day, after going for a walk around their home, Tom's

mother, who was rather shocked at the condition of their place, said the repairs looked like her husband had done them. Alice tried to make light of this damning statement for she knew it would make Tom mad. Unfortunately, Tom's mother did not realise this and ridiculed her for it, making Tom even angrier.

As Christians, Alice and Tom's believed that God expected them to help spread the gospel message in any way they could. For them, this included letters, newsletters, a web page, and much more. Every piece of written information that left their home had both of their names on it. This was not because Alice always agreed with what was in the written information but because Tom demanded it. After years of receiving abuse from people for things that Tom sent out in both their names, Alice finally plucked up the courage not to place her name on a letter she typed for Tom. Enraged, Tom accused her of being a traitor, disrespectful to him, and not doing her duty as a Christian or wife.

This abuse went on for weeks, but it was nothing compared to what happened when she finally sent out an email to a friend without letting him 'proofread' it first. He was supposed to check everything that she sent out to make sure it was OK. He told her that these friends would think she was the most stupid idiot they knew, a real total nincompoop due to all the spelling mistakes that were in the email. On top of all this, he made her promise that she would never send anything out again without him giving his OK to it. She grudgingly agreed to this to try and keep the peace.

Quite often, when things were not going his way around the home, Tom would say that if he had hit his first wife, then maybe she would not have used him like she did and things would have turned out differently. The first few times he said this, Alice told him that hitting someone was never right and reminded him of what she thought of abuse. This always caused a huge argument between them, with Tom getting angrier each time. However, Alice soon learnt that it was better to just shake her head and walk away. It took a while longer for it to sink in that what he was really saying was that he should hit her to make her do what he wanted. Nevertheless, when you hate arguments as much as Alice did, you will do nearly anything just to keep the peace.

Many people have favourite sayings, and Tom had three:

1. Nobody loves me.
2. I am the poorest person in the state or Australia.
3. It's not my fault, even if I did it.

These saying are often said in jest, but Tom meant them. Taking responsibility for any of his actions was something that Tom rarely did. While the children were quite young, he told Alice that she was the one who wanted them, so they were her responsibility to bring up. This meant that he expected half of special food which she bought or made, like cake, ice cream, biscuits, special fruit juice, etc., while the other half was to be shared between Alice and the children. If this didn't happen, he would whinge and complain.

To her credit, Alice was always able to put food on the table, and they always had clothes to wear. However, she can remember one day when they unexpectedly had guests for tea. Tom had invited them without asking her, and they had very little food in the house. Alice prepared the meal knowing that the next day they would run out of food and had no money to buy any more until their next pay day. The next day, it was coming close to lunchtime, and Tom asked what they were having for lunch. Alice told him she did not know as they had eaten the last of what they had for breakfast and today's lunch had been given to the visitors the night before. Tom abused her for being so stupid as to give the last of their food to his invited guests.

Alice continued praying that God would supply their needs as He promised in the Bible. Shortly after this, they received a phone call from a friend who had received boxes of second-grade vegetables which she was going to bring around to them—she was just making sure they were home. Someone else phoned to say that they had extra home-grown vegetables for them, and they would deliver them soon. Someone else phoned up with fruit to offer. By the end of that day, their fridge, pantry, and lounge room floor were all full of food, and Alice was busy phoning people, asking anyone and everyone if they would please take some off her hands. The scripture that came to Alice's mind that day was Philippians 4:19, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus." He had surely fulfilled His promise that day.

Despite everything that happened in Tom and Alice's home, Alice firmly believed that she was protecting her children from the worst things

Tom did. Although now she knows this was not the case at all. Behind her back, he was exceptionally, unbelievably, and systematically cruel to their children. If she ever found out about a little thing that Tom had done to them and tried to talk to him about it, he would punish them worse than before. So the children became too scared to let her know anything that Tom was doing to them.

There were many more things that had occurred that alerted Alice to the fact that things were not right in her home, but what could she do about it? How could she leave? She believed that to leave would be wrong. To her, what was happening was not domestic violence; Tom was just a very hard man to live and put up with. Also, Alice had very low self-esteem due to the constant ridicule Tom dished out, and she felt like an absolute failure. She felt like even if she could be free from Tom, she would never cope by herself while supporting the children. No, in her eyes, all she could do was stay in that bed not filled with roses and tough it out.

Chapter 4

Not Quite Yet



The last twelve months of Tom and Alice's relationship were torture for Alice, to say the least. Since being diagnosed with CF and MCS, she had recovered a bit and then regressed to worse than she was at the beginning. Alice often thought about moving closer to the ocean for her health, but there was never an opening to do so. Not even a beach holiday could be arranged; it was like God was saying not quite yet.

At first, Tom had encouraged her to try and find something to help her get better. However, as time passed, this encouragement turned into demands that Alice had to find something to cure herself. Tom told her that he was too sick to cope with her being sick any longer.

However, Tom's only real problem was that his back was injured in a couple of accidents years ago. These injuries were compounded by Tom not following doctor's or chiropractor's instructions which would have relieved most of his pain. A couple of times, he took too many prescription painkillers, which affected him severely. After this, every time he took them, Alice knew because he could not remember anything or think straight. She begged him not to take those particular tablets any more and to ask the doctor for something else, but Tom refused to do as she asked.

Around this time, Alice found out, quite by accident, that she had another major allergy. Tom had just finished doing some repairs to their particle board bed frame. It needed to be put back in place, and despite how heavy it was, he demanded that Alice help him put it back. Unable to do so properly, due to the weight, it irreparably broke. Tom abused Alice for not doing it properly and wrecking all his hard work. Then they decided that all they could do with the bed was dismantle the whole bed frame, and after cleaning up, they would place the mattress straight on the floor. Alice bent down to start cleaning up the remnants of the particle board when she started having major breathing problems. After making enquiries, she discovered she was allergic to particle board or, more accurately, the formaldehyde that was in it. This was now being released in larger amounts than usual due to it falling apart.

This would not normally be a problem for most people, but Tom and Alice's entire floor and all the inbuilt cupboards, of which there were many in their home, were made of particle board. To make matters worse, most of these were unsealed or not sealed properly. Tom and Alice discussed this problem when she had recovered from the allergy. This was something they usually did and decided that he would take all the cupboard doors off and polish them with a water-based polish outside. After a couple of days drying, he would reattach the doors. This would at least reduce the amount of unsealed particle board, making it better for her. As Alice's health and possibly life was on the line, time was of the essence.

To her absolute horror, although thinking about it she should not have been surprised, she overheard Tom talking to Arnold just a few days later. Tom had scrapped the idea of sealing all the particle board as Alice apparently was just overreacting and was paranoid about her allergies. He was going to spend the money on something else! This was a regular occurrence—Tom and Alice would discuss something like house renovations, replacing floor coverings, buying a car, getting different animals, etc. and come to a joint decision. Tom would then go off and do whatever he wanted regardless of what they had decided. But this decision was different as it was putting Alice's life at risk.

When Alice challenged Tom on what she had overheard, he told her that he had things he wanted to do too and that not everything revolved around her and her allergies. Alice couldn't begin to describe the turmoil that was going on in her head over this time. This was not the first time he

had done something that had adversely affected her health and life, and she started to wonder if he was trying to kill her.

One time Alice had travelled to Brisbane to see a health specialist. She never managed to see this specialist due to air fresheners in his waiting room that nearly caused Alice to go into anaphylactic shock. During her time away in Brisbane, Tom was going to paint the lounge and kitchen areas in their house. He was only to arrive to pick her up after it had been completed for several days, letting it air out to reduce the possibility of a major allergy. When Alice arrived home, she found Tom had set off flea bombs outside under tarps to try to kill the fleas that were around the outside of their house. This was something he knew that she was highly allergic to. Quite cross that Tom had left the place like this and holding her breath, Alice walked up the stairs and into the house, thinking it would be better. However, the house reeked of paint fumes, and poor Alice walked straight out the back door and sat in a shaded area. Arnold came and sat with her, making sure she was OK and informed her that Tom had only finished the painting the night before.

While they were sitting there talking, Tom brought the tarps that had been covering the flea bombs and put them behind Alice and Arnold on the ground in the direction that the wind was blowing from. As she was already sick, this caused an even more serious allergy. Alice told Tom to put them somewhere else, and he abused her for never being satisfied and very hard to please. After moving the tarps, Alice asked him to cut a couple of onions up and place them around the house to try to absorb the paint smell. After an hour or so, she decided to see if she could go into their house yet. Alice managed to take a couple of steps in the back door, and then retreated to her former position with Tom following. She asked him how many onions he had cut up as the place now totally reeked of onions. All that was in the pantry was the reply, which was about twenty! Due to all these different smells that were now in the house, there was no way she would be able to go inside that night. So Alice had to find a friendly neighbour who could take her in for the night.

Another time, after promising to move the motor vehicle away from the house before painting it, Tom commenced the paint work right beside the house in the direction the wind was blowing from. If that wasn't bad enough, he had left the house windows and doors wide open. Alice came in from down the back of the property where she had been feeding animals

and quickly closed up the house to stop more fumes coming in. However, the house was already filled with the toxic fumes, and she had to retreat outside. Alice worked out which way the wind was blowing and went upwind of Tom to ask him why he had not moved the car as agreed or at the very least closed the house up. He said he had assumed that she was in the house and would close it up when she smelt it and didn't feel like moving the vehicle. It never occurred to him that Alice would be down the back feeding the animals which she usually was at that time of day, nor did he ever say sorry.

From only these couple of stories, you can see why Alice was wondering if he was trying to kill her. But how could she leave him? It would be wrong to do so? Where could she go? Who would believe her? Alice mentioned some of her concerns to another Christian lady, who abruptly told her that she knew what he was like when she married him so shut up and put up with him.

During these last twelve months, the number of nights Alice lay awake at night crying quietly in bed she cannot recall, but she knows there were many. She would often call out to God to help her, to release her from this living hell, and often dreamt of a better life.

One day while Tom was out, Alice went to have a look for any emails she might have received on his computer, which was the only computer in their house connected to the Internet. This computer was in his office, which he usually occupied for many hours each day. On one of her emails was the subject line "When God Says No!" Her heart sank. She cried and cried and cried. Why must she endure this suffering? Why could she not leave?

It was about three weeks before Alice could open that email and read it and has loved it ever since. Although she has lost the original, it went something like this:

When it is not the right thing or not the right time,
God says, "No!"

When it is the right thing but not the right time,
God says, "Slow!"

But when it is the right thing and the right time,
God says, “Go!”

Although Alice cried and suffered a lot during this time, she never felt that God had deserted her. She always felt that He was close, working things out in His way in His time—she just wished He would work faster. Alice believes that if we could all see the end from the beginning, we would never question the way that God leads us or His timing.

Arnold changed quite a bit around this time, and Alice thought it was just him being a teenager. However, there were a couple of instances where she knew something else was wrong but could not figure out what. He was starting to become violent towards the animals like his father and did not feed and water them properly. One day, Alice challenged him about this. She told Arnold everyone in the house had to pull their weight. Being a young teenage boy, he was taller than her, and you can imagine her surprise when he pulled his arm back with his fist clenched to punch her in the face. Alice reminded Arnold that if he hit her like that, it would probably kill her due to neck injuries she already had. He replied that he knew. Just at this moment, Tom walked in and demanded to know what was going on. In retaliation for threatening Alice, he punched Arnold in the mouth despite the fact that he still had braces. What a mess it made of Arnold’s mouth.

Arnold threatened Alice a few times like this within the last twelve to eighteen months that Alice was with Tom. However, this was the only time that Tom found out and hit him—well to Alice’s knowledge anyway. Later, through his lawyer, Tom told how Arnold was on drugs during this period of time. This was a teenager that lived at home, rarely went out, did no paid work, and whose only source of income was pocket money from his father! Apparently Tom knew he was on drugs and kept giving him money anyway. So who was really buying those drugs?

Slowly Alice’s health declined more and more, and she started making general enquiries about getting someone in to clean the house for her. However, she realised Tom would never allow that to happen as he demanded that the house be cleaned before anyone, even ambulance officers, came in. So she gave up on that idea even though she had only managed to mop the floors three times in six months. Yet each time, before the floors were dry, Tom had already made them dirty, spilling drinks and

food over them. Alice was simply not coping, but what was she supposed to do?

Alice had an important project that she was working on at this time. She had been working on it for a couple of years as it was very large. Now it looked like she would never be able to complete it as she had become so sick. At this point in time, her daily prayers were that God would give her the strength to finish this important project for His work, then, and if it was His will, she would die.

God did give Alice the strength to finish this important project, although she really struggled to do it, and the work that she was expected to do around the house—make three meals a day, do the dishes, and laundry. After her attempt to get the house fixed so it wouldn't affect her health so much failed so miserably, she tried to discuss moving. Tom would only discuss moving further out into the bush, further away from people and especially doctors and hospitals that she needed. Not only this, but the areas he chose were filled with things she was highly allergic to. She tried to put forward the idea that they should move closer to the beach as research showed that the fresh salt air would help to improve her health. That idea was dismissed before the discussion barely began.

After Sally left home to live on her own, Tom still refused to learn how to use the EpiPen in case Alice could not administer it herself. She felt like her options were getting very limited and started to make enquiries about putting herself into a nursing home so that someone would be around to look after her. However, to do this, their house would probably have to be sold—another dead end.

Alice finally decided that if she stayed too much longer she would die but still felt it was wrong to leave. Yet to stay and die would mean to commit suicide, something she was totally against. So Alice determined to temporarily leave to regain her health. She made an appointment with her doctor, printed out forms for Housing Commission, etc., and gathered together everything she thought she would need and hid it. The next shopping day, she was going for help.

Chapter 5

God Says Go



The day before Alice planned to leave Tom, Sally phoned and told her about allegations against Tom—of incest, paedophilia, and sexual assault. Alice was shocked to the core, and Sally was just as nervous, not sure if her mother would believe her or cut her off and never speak to her again. As horrible as this information was, it was the kind of information Alice needed. It gave her the biblical and moral reasons and strength to leave, which she knew she had to do that day. For the last twelve months or so, God had been saying no! Now, quite clearly, He was saying go!

Alice planned to pack and leave when Tom went out. She was so scared she ended up with diarrhoea for twenty minutes. This cut her time for leaving down considerably. Alice phoned a friend who usually was not home that time of day, but for some reason which even she didn't understand, she had managed to knock off work early and was home. Alice told her she had to get out, and the friend asked how long they had. Fifteen minutes was Alice's reply. The friend said she would come straight around.

Quickly Alice packed her Bible, hymn book, a few clothes, a pillow, and doona from off the bed, air purifier, and her hand bag. She was still packing the last of her things when her friend arrived, and they bundled everything into the car. They left taking a back route to ensure that they did not bump into Tom on his way home.

Why was Alice so scared? She knew how Tom had treated one of his daughters, Lyn, who had accused him of sexual assault years ago, and it was not nice. As Lyn had sisters and was the only one making the complaint and she would not tell Alice when or how, Alice did not believe her. However, after the new revelation about more alleged victims, Alice did believe her. Lyn dropped her complaint to the police after only a short time, not because they were false but because she could not get anyone who knew what was happening to say so. This was something else Alice had only just found out. Also Alice is one of those people who talk with their eyes, and she knew that if she spent any time with Tom, he would have found out that she had been told about the allegations. Not only had she learnt about all these horrible, disgusting allegations which she believed to be true, she had also learnt that Tom had tried to kill Lyn twice because of her accusations against him years ago. This is why Alice fled for her life.

Hiding out at a friend's place that night was no fun. The next morning, Alice had a very strained phone call with a family member who confirmed the allegations she had been told about the day before. Alice knew this was the point of no return. From here on, her life would be very different. Her friend drove her to Nambour, and Alice started her appointments and looked for emergency accommodation. The first place couldn't help her but told of somewhere else to go. The same thing happened at the second, third, and fourth place, only the fourth place was her last option. Her friend asked Alice what she was going to do. Alice told her that she would never go back and would sleep in the gutter if she had to but was secretly praying the situation would never come to that.

This attitude of not turning back reminded Alice of a Bible story in the Old Testament. God was about to destroy Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plains because of their citizens' gross wickedness. Lot, his wife, and two daughters were delaying their departure at the peril of their lives. The angels took them by the arm and led them out of the city and told them to flee and not look back. Lot's wife disobeyed and looked back

to where all her possessions and the rest of her children were and was instantly transformed into a pillar of salt (see Genesis 19:1–29). Alice knew her situation was quite different, but she knew that she could never go back because if she did so, she would die one way or another.

The situation Alice found herself in was hard for her to comprehend—a place that she had called home and a partner that she had loved for over twenty years and done so much for was now an unsafe place and a person she did not want to see again. Alice’s life had irreversibly changed, and she had no idea how she would cope. All she could do was trust in God.

The last thing that was left for Alice to do that day was an appointment with a social worker at the local women’s shelter to help her fill out the domestic violence order (DVO) she wanted to take out against Tom. So her friend and Alice waited around town to meet up with this lady. Taking Alice to a safe location, the social worker helped her complete the form and then started to fill out another one. Alice was watching her curiously when she looked up at Alice and said, “Sorry, I forgot to ask you first. This is an application to stay in one of our units. You are eligible, and we have one available if you would like to stay with us. Would you like to do that?” Even as Alice spoke of this incident, tears were welling up in her eyes just like they did on that day. Every other door had been slammed shut in her face, and now here was one that was flung wide open and someone was waiting to help her through it! Praise God!

Gladly accepting the offer for accommodation, Alice knew in her heart that God was working to help her. Her friend had unexpectedly been home to help her, and now she had accommodation. Alice stayed with this women’s shelter for about four months, longer than most people as she was moved to a halfway house. This was mostly due to the fact that her DVO court case was still in progress, and she wanted to leave the area when it was over.

At the women’s shelter, Alice found out that a lot of what had been happening in her relationship with Tom, and while she was still living at home as a teenager, was actually domestic violence. As a child, she had seen extreme domestic violence and vowed never to put up with that sort of behaviour. In fact she had told Tom when they first got together that if he ever hit her, he would not see her for dust and she would take him to the

cleaners, and he knew she was serious. So to find out she too had suffered domestic violence for all those years shook her to the core.

Alice felt like a total failure and ashamed of what she had been through but very glad that she was out of that situation with God's help and blessing.

Chapter 6

Starting a New Life



While living at the women’s shelter, Alice started her new life. She slowly began doing things differently and buying things that Tom would never have approved of. She also learnt more about the allegations against Tom, and more than ever, she was left without any doubt in her mind that they are all true. Also Alice found out about more alleged victims in numbers that beg belief that Tom had gotten away with this disgusting, filthy habit for so long and never been successfully charged for it. This information put a very heavy and hard emotional strain on Alice, but the one thing that kept her going was the thought that no matter what she was enduring, Tom’s daughters had gone through so much worse. They had survived it, so could she—with God’s help and through His power.

Four days after moving into the women’s shelter, Alice summoned up the courage to phone Lyn. Alice told Lyn that she had left Tom, which Lyn already knew about, and told Lyn that she was so very sorry that she did not believe her years ago. Lyn cried and cried, then thanked Alice for saying sorry. Lyn was very concerned that Alice was living so close to

where Tom lived and offered to give her accommodation interstate and assistance to move. Thanking her kindly for such support, Alice declined Lyn's generous offer, stating that she was safe in the women's shelter. This conversation just reinforced to Alice how careful she had to be living so close to Tom.

Like a lot of Christians, Alice tended to have different favourite texts at different times that seem to suit what she was going through. Alice's most favourite text during this dark time was, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

About five days after leaving Tom, Alice opened her Bible, and her eyes fell on Isaiah 41:1. She read all the way to verse 14 and received a great blessing from it. To her, it was like God was saying that He was in control of what would happen in the court case, that what He wanted would happen, and that He would take care of Alice. At church the next Sabbath, a member came up to her and told her she had been impressed to tell Alice to read these exact same texts. Then a couple of months later, another friend from a different denomination sent Alice a card quoting her these verses.

Friends, when God tells us something once, we should listen. When He repeats it, He is confirming what He has already said. When He says the same things three times, we need to sit up and take notice because He does not emphasise anything without a good reason.

So here are the texts that God told Alice to read, Isaiah 41:10–13:

Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.

Behold, all they that were incensed against thee shall be ashamed and confounded: they shall be as nothing; and they that strive with thee shall perish.

Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them, even them that contended with thee: they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought.

For I the LORD thy God will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not; I will help thee.

These scriptures reminded Alice of an audio CD she once listened to of a missionary who was captured and held hostage. The name of the man was Paul Die, and the scripture that kept him going through his mind during his captivity and escape was 2 Timothy 1:7, “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” What a wonderful God! He does not want us to live in fear but have a spirit of power, love, and a sound mind—three things you simply don’t have when you are living in fear.

A hymn that became Alice’s favourite at this time and brought her much comfort was written by H. G. Spafford (1829–1888). It is reported by some that Spafford lost his only son to scarlet fever, most of his extensive real estate during massive fires, and his four daughters in a shipping accident—all within a very short space of time. While on another ship, which the skipper had stopped over the place where he believed the ship of Spafford’s daughters had come to grief, H. G. Spafford wrote the words, “It is well with my soul”. Two years later, he completed the hymn “When Peace, Like a River”:

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Chorus

It is well, with my soul,
It is well, with my soul,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, Oh, the bliss of the glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more;
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

After a couple of weeks of hearing more allegations against Tom, Alice prayed to God to cause this all to stop. It was all getting too much for her to bear, and she could not stand listening to it any more. God answered her prayer, and everything seemed to quiet down for a while. Then, out of the blue, it all started up again. She called out to God and asked Him why it had started again as Alice thought all this was over. A little voice said, “No. You said you could not bear any more at that time. Now you are stronger, there is more to find out.” So through God’s strength, Alice endured the revelations and trials that lay on her path.

As with a lot of women and children who have escaped domestic violence, Alice was in hiding. She only left the women’s shelter when she felt safe enough to do so. It had been many years since she had attended any Seventh-day Adventist church meeting mostly due to her MCS, Tom’s attitude towards that church, and his treatment of her when she was having severe attacks. However, on the first Friday afternoon after leaving Tom, Alice received a phone call from her mum, Eunice. During the call, she told Alice that she thought she should go to church. That was nothing unusual for Eunice, so Alice did not pay much attention to it. A little later, she was talking to Sally, who told her the same thing. Alice thought it was a little odd coming from Sally but then dismissed it. A while later, Alice was talking to her dad, and he told her she should go to church. *Wow!* Her dad told her to go to church? Alice was shocked. Yes, it was only a suggestion, but her dad had never said anything like that to her before and he hated the Seventh-day Adventist church because of past history with them. Yet that is where he was telling Alice to go. So Alice looked up and said, “OK, God, if you want me to go to church tomorrow, I will go, but you are going to have to comfort me because I am scared.”

The next morning, she readied herself for church and headed off walking nearly without a care in the world, when suddenly she received a text message. It was from Arnold, who still lived with Tom, and he wanted to know what she was doing. Alice became paralysed with fear. She did not know what to do. Alice called out to God, telling Him that three

different people had told her to go to church and she took it that it was a message from Him. All of a sudden, she felt two very big, very strong arms around her. Alice knew it was God's presence, and she calmed down. She told God that she would still go to church, but He would have to hold her the whole time. So once more, she headed off to church with God's arms around her. During this walk, Alice passed a whole front fence of beautiful jasmine and a very large frangipani tree both in full bloom. She was usually very allergic to the scent of both these flowers, yet on this particular day, she walked very close to them with no ill effects—something she has never been able to repeat.

As Alice arrived at church, she noticed a group of friends talking down the side of the building. This group included a neighbour and the local minister who both knew her very well. As she walked closer, she could hear them asking each other who the lady was walking towards them. None of them seemed to know. What puzzled them more was they noticed that she was walking towards them as if she knew them. Alice stopped less than a metre away from the group and took off her sunhat. Suddenly the neighbour and minister recognised her. They could not believe how much she had changed since they last saw her, which was only a couple of weeks. They told Alice that she looked so much healthier, happier, slimmer, and that she looked like she was at peace with God. Unfortunately, they could not say the same for Tom, who they were still friends with and had visited.

How noticeable was this difference? Well, here is another story that might shock you because it shocked Alice. After the court case where Alice had applied for a DVO against Tom, the social worker from the women's shelter, who was there with her, asked who a particular woman was. Alice informed her that it was her sister-in-law and asked why she wanted to know. The social worker then told Alice that this lady had been asking if anyone had seen Alice and was wondering if she was going to show up or not for the case. This was being said just after Alice walked past her sister-in-law. When family who see you nearly every week or two do not recognise you after only a couple of weeks, then you know you have changed.

Now back to Alice's church visit. A small portion on her diary notes for this day probably puts it best:

When father and mother, sister and brother forsake thee, then the Lord will raise thee up.

God will not let any trial come upon us that we are not able to bear—in *His strength*! This is a 100 per cent factual promise. God is so good.

God has blessed me beyond my wildest dreams since Wednesday. His timing is beyond perfect. He has slammed doors in my face that were not the right direction and opened unlikely ones and pushed me through with loving hands. He put His arms around me as I walked to church—when I was scared. He had everybody not recognise me first off, then be overcome with love, hugs and comfort when they did. He had the usher talk to me. He gave me places to sit so I did not have an allergy. He sat me at a table with a woman who asked questions and prodded me (very nicely) until she found out what was going on. This lady was sexually abused by her father and he also did the same to her daughter.

God is awesome, loving, powerful, and simply amazing. He can give a peace beyond all understanding no matter what trials we have to face.

I love my God!

But He loved me first!

Over time, Alice received mixed reactions from the members of that church—some did not want to talk to her; some stabbed her in the back, while others became part of her support base to help her through those tough days. Do you believe God sometimes uses other people to give us a message? Do you believe God will protect and care for you? Alice does! To Alice, that first day going back to the Seventh-day Adventist church really proved it. But there was more to come.

Church attendance for Alice became a regular occurrence as she longed for Christian company. Taking the slightest of detours from the shortest route to church, she would enter the local council gardens,

wandering around or sitting, and watch the river peacefully gliding by. This was not just a physical rest on her journey but emotional and spiritual. Here Alice would sit and talk with God, write notes of things she thought about or that just popped into her head, and generally be refreshed. This part of the trip to church was so enjoyable for Alice that she made sure she left early for church so that she could fit this time in and not be late for the start of church.

Everyone who came to the women's shelter was told that all sorts of women and children come through these shelters and to always keep your doors locked and never lend money to anyone else. Alice soon saw why for herself which really saddened her. However, she also met some very lovely ladies there.

One day, one of these ladies, Jenny, called out to Alice as she was taking her rubbish out to the wheelie bin. "You will be so proud of me," Jenny said excitedly. "Why?" Alice asked a little bit puzzled and amused at the unusual comment from someone who was nearly a total stranger. Jenny went on to explain that earlier that day, she had finally told someone she knew that she had left her husband and was living in a women's shelter. For some reason, Jenny, like some of the others, looked up to Alice as someone who was coping very well despite her current circumstances and enjoyed helping others. After this chat, Alice and Jenny talked quite a lot.

The day after one of their special talks, Alice went out and purchased some Precious Promise cards from the local Christian bookshop and gave them to Jenny who had been asking religious questions. The other ladies at the shelter considered Jenny special because Alice had purchased her a gift. A couple of days later, Jenny told Alice that she would lay all the cards out on a table or bed and then ask God to pick one for her. Often she would pick it up, read it, and put it back down, thinking it must be the wrong card for the day, only to be impressed to pick it up again and turn it over. There on the other side of the card was the exact promise that she needed for that day, and she praised God.

One Sabbath, Alice was leaving for church when another lady, Mel, asked her to pray to her God that He would help Mel get the car she was trying to buy. Mel confessed to Alice that she didn't believe in God but knew Alice did, and Mel believed that God would hear Alice's prayer

because of Alice's belief—that is if He existed. Alice smiled and promised she would do that for her. At church, Alice and one of the elders had special prayers that Mel would get the car. It was a few days before Alice saw Mel again, and Mel thanked her and her God for helping Mel get the car. Now Mel had another dilemma. She needed to be accepted for the new job that she was applying for to pay for the car. She looked skyward and said, "If you are up there", then paused and hung her head. Then looking skyward once again she said, "I know you are up there because you helped me get the car. Please help me now to be accepted for this new job so I can pay for the car." Mel was accepted for this new job and earlier than expected. God truly works in mysterious ways.

During one of the court appearances, the judge put in place that Alice could, under police escort, go back home and retrieve personal property only. A time limit had to be set, and hers was about twenty minutes. Upon arriving at her home, she found some friends, Peter and Clare, who had travelled a long distance to be there. Alice gathered up as much of her personal property as quickly as she could, with the help of the two social workers from the women's shelter. As Alice was walking out for the last time, she heard Clare abusing the social workers, shouting that they had taken far more than the twenty minutes allowed and were homewreckers. Clare then very abruptly and forcefully said she wanted a word with Alice. Alice knew better than to try and discuss anything with Clare, who was known for her vicious tongue. So Alice said no. As Alice walked to the car owned by the women's shelter, Clare yelled out what she wanted to say anyway. It was something to the effect that Alice's daughter was a very evil person and that when Sally had spent all the money Alice received, Sally would dump Alice and she would be left with nothing. Alice did not reply to this nasty taunt but simply turned to Arnold and said a quick goodbye to him before being driven away by the social workers.

On the trip back to the women's shelter, both of the social workers informed Alice that Clare had become so abusive to them while they were carrying her things out to the car that they nearly called the police officer, who was watching elsewhere, to arrest her. They had never been abused so much in many years. The social workers also asked Alice if these were the friends who wanted to meet her at a park near the shelter. When Alice told them they were, they were very glad that she had cancelled the meeting. They believed that the meeting would have ended in disaster if Alice had

attended it, with them either following her or trying to kidnap her. This all saddened Alice greatly. Clare, who called herself a Christian, had abused these social workers worse than most non-Christians for simply doing their job. It made Alice's life at the women's shelter that much harder as one of these social workers constantly badgered her about her religion and its hypocrites.

A short time after this, Alice was talking to Arnold on the phone. Although their relationship was strained because of Alice and Tom's separation and the allegations against Tom that Arnold did not believe, Alice and Arnold still talked. Arnold told her that there had been terrible bush fires in the area where he and Tom lived. As part of the Bush Fire Brigade, Arnold had been out for days fighting the fires. He told her that it was a good thing she was not still living there as the smoke was so thick it would have killed her. Alice sent a silent prayer up to God thanking Him for His care, watchfulness, and timing so that she was not there to suffer from that smoke.

As Tom decided to fight the DVO that Alice was trying to place on him to keep herself safe, the court proceedings went for a lot longer than she anticipated. Not on one particular day, but some was done one day then adjourned for a month, and then more was completed then adjourned for another month. With each court case, fear rose within Alice knowing that Tom would be in town and she would have to see him again. Not only this, but Tom was talking with mutual friends, telling them of plots of how he was going to kill Alice. She just wanted to run and hide in another part of the country, but the social workers advised her not to do this.

Alice also had a problem of limited money, only being on the disability support pension. This meant that when the time came for her to move, she would not have the finances to pay for bond or advance rent. She went to the Department of Housing to see if they could help, but as Tom and Alice owned their own home, they said they couldn't help. Alice spoke to the social workers about this, and one of them told her there was some special paperwork she could fill in to give to the Department of Housing that would sort it all out. She told Alice just to let her know when she needed it and she would fill it in. This was a great relief for Alice.

Everything looked like it was all slowly falling into place, and her new life seemed a bit smoother for a while. Alice was trusting more and

more in God. She was not trying to control things as much but letting go and letting God!

Chapter 7

New Joys and Challenges



A life without challenges is very boring, which is something Alice could not say about her life right now. It seemed at every turn, there were new joys and more changes, which were both exciting and scary. However, Alice remembered what she was told at the women's shelter—only take one small step at a time. In this way, she could achieve without being overwhelmed.

The women's shelter only offered short-term accommodation and help for women and their children who have left a domestically violent situation. That stay is usually only up to three months. By then you are expected to have found your own accommodation. However, Alice had no desire to live in the immediate area, for safety reasons, and when the DVO court case was over, she fully intended to move to Redcliffe to be near Sally. As her three months was nearly up and the court case still not completed, the social workers offered for her to move into a halfway house. This was in the Tewantin area, well away from the main shelter, but it gave Alice more freedom to live and keep her in the area till the court

case was over. Alice accepted this offer, knowing it would not be easy living there.

Moving to the halfway house was the simplest of the challenges as the social workers could use their vehicle to move Alice's possessions there. The biggest challenge was going to be how to get all her grocery shopping done without a vehicle with the main shopping centre being three kilometres away and a poor bus service. Alice had previously, through emails, asked that Tom give her one of their three vehicles of which two were working and roadworthy. However, Tom had refused. So with only two weeks before she was required to relocate, Alice madly looked around for a suitable, cheap car. Alice made enquiries with friends and everyone she knew. Amazingly, she found a little Ford Laser for \$1,500! Against numerous odds, the owners even managed to get the roadworthy certificate completed in time for Alice to transfer the registration into her name the day she was moving. What wonderful timing! Again Alice was sure that God had a hand in it.

Now that Alice was closer to the beach, she wanted to make the most of it as she knew it would help her health. So she planned to take a walk along the beach in the water every day that she possibly could. She started every second morning and would go for about an hour's walk along the water's edge while deeply breathing in the lovely salty air. Alice discovered that this was also a very good stress reliever.

One day shortly after moving to the Tewantin area, Alice decided to go visit some old friends who lived close by. She knocked on the front door. The gentleman, Wayne, answered and asked what he could do for her. Alice said, "Hello, Wayne." He just stood there and looked at her even harder. "Who are you?" Wayne asked. When Alice told him, he was so excited and pleased to see her that he had trouble unlocking and opening the door. All the while he was yelling to his wife, Betty, to get out to the front door, they had a special visitor. Betty appeared from around the corner as Alice entered the house and immediately threw her arms around Alice. Betty told Alice that she had been impressed that she was going to receive a special visitor that day but had no idea who. When Alice arrived, Betty knew Alice was the one she was expecting.

They spent a few lovely hours together, and as Christmas was fast approaching, they insisted that Alice come to their place for lunch if she

had no other plans. Unfortunately, Alice did have other plans but assured them that if they fell through for any reason, she would be there with them. Alice also invited Betty to come for a walk down the beach with her the next morning, which she gladly accepted.

Christmas Day was nearly upon them, and Alice's plans for that day had fallen through. So she phoned Wayne and Betty with the news and to inform them she could grace them with her presence for Christmas. They were delighted. Betty told Alice that their two boys would be home for Christmas but not their daughter. This was a concern for them as the brothers did not get along and the sister was the one who kept the peace in the house. Alice told Betty not to worry; she would act like a big sister to the boys and kick their butts if they needed it—figuratively speaking of course.

That Christmas was the nicest Christmas Alice had in many years, and both of Wayne and Betty's boys—one who was a couple of years older and the other a couple of years younger than Alice—behaved themselves. Alice arrived about 11 a.m. and did not return home till late in the afternoon. Some of Wayne and Betty's neighbours came over, and they all chatted about many different topics. During this conversation, it came up that one neighbour had his own recording studio. Well, a room in his house where he had his equipment for recording which did a rather nice job. He offered to put a few songs down for Alice if she wanted to do some singing. Over two days, they put down fourteen songs, which Alice sang to pre-recorded karaoke music. She was very pleased with the result and sent copies to Eunice and to Wayne and Betty for their introduction.

Unfortunately, the car that Alice had purchased had more problems than she anticipated. She was planning to fix it and had it booked into a mechanic's to do so. Alice was also planning to pay for car insurance on her next payday. However, before any of this was accomplished, she had a serious accident, and her car was written off. The accident was not her fault, so Alice had to try and get compensation from the other driver.

A couple of days after the accident, Alice was in the local library when the other driver and his partner approached her. They were surprised and pleased to see her and enquired about how Alice was and promised to pay her a small sum each fortnight out of their Centrelink pay until they paid her the value of the car. If they could pay more later, they would. A

written agreement between the two parties was put in place through the Dispute Resolution Centre. This couple faithfully paid Alice the agreed sum of money for about twelve months, when they paid the balance in a lump sum. Yes, there are still some honest people in this world.

Nevertheless, this accident left Alice without a car and temporarily unable to look after herself due to the internal bruising she suffered. While at the hospital after the accident, Alice managed to get hold of Betty, who arrived at the hospital as soon as she could to make sure Alice was OK. The staff thought that Betty was Alice's mother because she was so caring and loving. Wayne and Betty took Alice into their home and cared for her until she could look after herself again, which were several days. When Betty first offered this, Alice thought it would be a huge inconvenience for them as she knew that both of their sons were staying with them. However, Betty informed her that strangely the one son had made an excuse the night before and returned to his own home, leaving them with a spare room in which she could stay. The reasons the son gave for leaving did not make any sense, but God knew Alice would need caring for and an empty room was required.

Alice had known Wayne and Betty for many years, and they were good friends, but this time that they spent together well and truly cemented their relationship and they became more like family. Betty loaned Alice a couple of books about domestic violence which were real eye-openers for her and also very comforting.

After a few phone calls, Alice managed to arrange a lift to the local church. One of the men from church asked her a burning question—what are you doing with your life right now? Her reply was “Hiding”. It sounded so pathetic that Alice decided to do something about it. So she started writing more short Bible studies for her website. Alice felt good doing something positive and practical for a change, and it brought her closer to God.

Despite these good things happening, the DVO case was still before the court. Finally, the judge decided on the case, and although he had put in place a temporary DVO in the first two court appearances, in the end, he could not give a permanent one due to the fact that although Alice could prove that domestic violence occurred during their relationship, she could not prove that it would continue. This was mostly due to Tom only ever

making one phone call to Alice to try and find her after she left him, although he called all her family and viciously threatened Sally for not telling him where Alice was. The judge also took into consideration that Alice did not intend to stay in the area.

Alice felt like the legal system had let her down. She wanted justice not just for herself but for all of Tom's daughters and the other children and young women who had suffered so much for so many years at Tom's hand. Why was it taking so long to get some form of justice? Why were there so many hold-ups, hurdles, and red tape? Alice did not have the answers for these questions, but God did reveal something to her one day when she was asking these questions. It was like a little voice said, "How do you think I feel? I was falsely accused over 6,000 years ago, but I am still patiently waiting for justice to happen."

Alice believes that Lucifer, the light bearer, who became Satan, the adversary, accused God of seeking self-exaltation without any sacrifice on His part and that He required total submission and obedience from His created beings. Satan wanted to set up a kingdom where there were no laws, where everyone would be truly free. That is why this world is in the mess that it is. Satan deceived the first prince of the world, Adam, and in so doing, took this position for himself. However, Satan does not get everything his way as God has placed restrictions on him because God owns and has redeemed this world for Himself. Yet God is still waiting to be fully vindicated and be pronounced just, fair, merciful, honest, and loving by all. If God the Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of this world who is totally perfect and has never done a thing wrong is still waiting for justice after more than 6,000 years, then how can we as sinful human beings demand instant justice? Maybe that is why John in Revelation 14:12 refers to "the patience of the saints".

Shaken, terrified, and bewildered by the outcome of the DVO case, which her lawyer assured her was a guaranteed winner, Alice returned to the halfway house. She didn't feel safe any more, and Tom had told people he knew exactly where she was living and he would make sure she would get what she deserved—leaving any details to their imagination. Now what could she do? Alice packed nearly everything she owned into boxes. She made sure that she had several escape routes planned for every place that she visited and cancelled any unnecessary outings. Alice also decided that she would leave the area as soon as possible, but there was one hitch.

Alice didn't have enough money saved up for bond and advance rent. She had arranged for a social worker to complete special paperwork to help her out, but she was now away on three weeks' holiday. This meant that despite wanting to just run, Alice had to stay put—at least for a while.

The next few weeks dragged by as Alice impatiently waited for the social worker to return from holidays. She asked if someone else could do the paperwork, but they told her only that one person could or would do it. Filled with fear, anger, anxiety, frustrations, and confusion, Alice was awash with emotions and became quite depressed and cried a lot. She felt like a helpless animal trapped in a cage, knowing that someone out there wanted her dead, was threatening to kill her, but there was nothing she could do but sit and wait for it to happen. For although many threats were made, they were only verbal with no witnesses to corroborate them, so nothing could be done.

During this time, the counsellor from the women's shelter came to visit Alice. She was horrified that Alice had packed all her things up and was living out of boxes. She told Alice that this was not a healthy way to live and tried to convince her that she should unpack again. But Alice stood her ground, saying she was not safe there and the sooner she could get out of the area, the better for her. The counsellor told Alice that if she ran now, she would be running all her life; she needed to try and calm down; that she was safe; and to live here for a while. However, Alice knew differently. She knew what Tom was capable of and had witnessed how he had treated others. She knew the only thing for her to do was keep her head down until she could move further away.

At long last, the three weeks were over, and the social worker filled out the paperwork that was required. She was quite upset that none of the others had completed it for Alice as she said any of them could have done it. This bewildered Alice, but she was glad to have this paperwork and hastily made arrangements to move.

The months that Alice spent at the halfway house were definitely filled with trials. Trials about the court case, car accident, and even the promised paperwork. But there were also times of pleasure like spending Christmas with friends and recording music. This is the case with most people's lives. However, what they see most is what they focus on, which is not necessarily what is happening the most.

Chapter 8

Moving, Moving, Moving



Moving was one thing that Alice hated doing more than anything else. Yet once again she was moving, this time to Redcliffe where she wanted to settle down and live. Alice intended to stay with Sally for a few weeks while looking for a place of her own to rent. However, sometimes the best-laid plans just don't work out.

While living with Sally, Alice started to purchase a car, paying it off while using it. The seller had promised to get a roadworthy certificate for it within six weeks. After six months and many hassles with the car and still no roadworthy certificate in sight, Alice returned the car to the seller, demanding her money back which she received. This, of course, again left Alice without a car and required her to walk or use public transport a lot.

Sally's lease on the place she was renting ran out about a month after Alice moved in with her. Sally had arranged another place to live, but this meant Alice had to move again too. To complicate things further, Alice had slipped a disk in her lower back the week before they were to move into the new rental. This rendered Alice barely capable of walking or looking after herself, let alone helping with the move. So Sally and her

friends moved all her and Alice's stuff to the new place. A friend of Sally also moved in to help share the cost of the rent.

Alice spent a lot of time in bed on heavy painkillers, waiting for her back to heal. Over time and with the aid of a walking stick, Alice slowly began to walk a bit further. However, it took a couple of months before she could get around much at all. Finally she could drive again, and the hunt was on to find a place of her own to rent.

This was harder than Alice expected. Most of the units she looked at had lovely gardens with flowering plants that she was highly allergic to. Alice was starting to get desperate and looking at places that would be difficult for her to afford, but she so much wanted somewhere of her own to live. One day she was picking Sally up from an appointment and had to wait for her. Alice picked up the newspaper in the waiting room and just happened to look through the classified advertisements. There she found a unit for private rent. She copied down the phone number even though the paper was a couple of days old and Sally said it was probably not worth making enquiries about. Upon arriving back at Sally's place, Alice phoned the number and made arrangements to view the unit that afternoon.

How exciting! Maybe this would be the place for Alice, just maybe. The unit was rented out directly by the owners and was very neat, tidy, and well cared for. The owner said she wanted someone rather quiet to live there as the other tenant was a shift worker. This suited Alice fine and told the owner that she wanted to apply to rent it. The owner took down her details and said she would phone back in a couple of days to let Alice know if she had it or not.

This unit was just perfect for Alice, and she prayed that God would touch the owner's hearts and let Alice rent it. The very next day, the owner phoned back and told Alice she had been accepted as the tenant for the unit as long as she could come up with the advance rent and bond. Alice very nervously went straight down to the Department of Housing to apply for a bond loan and advance rent with the special paperwork the social worker had given her. It all went through like clockwork, and Alice was in the unit within a week or so.

The next problem was furniture! Alice had very little as property settlement was a long way off and all she had managed to obtain from her

home was personal property. She had purchased a few second-hand items—a computer desk and chair, a second-hand washing machine, and fridge—that was about it! A friend gave her saucepans, a dinner set, cutlery, a lounge suite, a double-bed mattress, a wooden dining chair, and many other things. This friend's kindness has never nor will be forgotten by Alice.

A short time after moving into her unit, Alice saw a car pull up across the road from her place. The man walked straight across the road and knocked on her front door. As usual both her front wooden and screen doors were locked. She unlocked the wooden one and opened it. The man said he was from Telstra and wanted to confirm certain details. When Alice would not give him what he wanted, he asked to come into her unit. Alice became very suspicious and confused as to what was going on. She refused to let him in, and he returned to his vehicle and drove away. Alice never found out who this man really was or why he came to her place, but she felt fairly safe. Why? Something very special had happened just hours earlier.

Alice had been walking around in her small front yard when a couple of bar-shouldered doves landed very close to her. All but one took off nearly immediately. That one just stood there looking at her for a few moments. As Alice moved slowly towards it, the bird flew over to the fence. Talking calmly and quietly to the dove, Alice slowly made her way over to the fence, a distance of several metres. She reached out her hand, and to her surprise, the bird just sat there. Alice patted the bird's chest feathers, rubbing up and down gently. As she pulled her hand away, the bird cooed and flew away. How strange, Alice thought, that a totally wild bird would let her pat it when it had every opportunity to just fly away. After the strange visitor that day, Alice wondered if God made that bird stay there to let her know that He was there to protect her. In that way, she would not be as scared of that visitor as she may have been.

Feeling safe in her own home was important to Alice, and having moved five times within seven months, she certainly did not want to move again. No, now it was time for her to put down some roots and stay for many years.

Chapter 9

Setting Up Home



While still living in Tewanin, Alice had sought legal advice and did research about property settlement and divorce. She wanted to get things over and done with between Tom and her as quickly and painlessly as possible, for both of them. This would also help her to set up her own home the way she liked it, without buying items that she would receive in property settlement.

Taking all the advice given her, Alice waited until she was in her own unit then contacted the Dispute Resolution Centre, which is part of the Justice Department of Queensland, to arrange property settlement through them. This service was free, making the whole process much cheaper than going through lawyers. After a couple of mediation phone calls, one being several hours long, an agreement was made between Tom and Alice as to how they were to split up their goods and what Tom would pay Alice for the house and property along with other items Tom was keeping. Alice was to send a small truck to their home where Tom would have all the agreed items packed and furniture ready to be moved, and he would also pay Alice on that same date. Alice would then sign over the property to Tom.

To make this agreement legal, Alice took it to a lawyer. He advised her to wait until after the items and furniture had been received before trying to make it legal. However, Tom also took the agreement to his lawyer, who wrote to Alice lowering the amount Tom would pay her, minus an extra \$4,000 which was half of Tom's lawyer fees. Alice's lawyer replied that such an agreement was unacceptable but that the truck would be sent on the agreed day.

Tom insisted that Alice not come with the truck, not that she wanted to, but that someone else drive it and collect the agreed items. Although making it quite expensive for Alice, she agreed to this, believing that Tom would keep to their agreement, which he had already changed to his advantage. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and Tom informed the driver of the truck that he had no intentions of keeping the agreement he and Alice had made.

It was obvious to Alice from just a quick look at the items in the truck that Tom had short-sheeted Alice. She felt very cheated, especially as only about six months before she left Tom, he had set himself up as a Christian minister. This was not the way a Christian was supposed to act, but thinking about it, Alice knew this was how Tom operated—Tom first, second, and last. Alice knew this dispute would have to be taken up with the lawyers, but first she had to go through every box and check off what was there and make a list of what was missing.

Thinking that all would go well with property settlement, Eunice had arranged to come for a visit a couple of weeks after that date. Now Alice not only had to go through everything but repack most of it so that she would have room in her unit for Eunice to stay.

Although Alice was very excited with the prospect of Eunice coming, she had a lot to do before Eunice arrived. One of the most important things was to buy a bed frame to put her single-bed mattress on. Every time she went out, Alice looked in all the second-hand shops, and with just days to spare, she finally found a lovely wooden bed frame. It was being sold with a mattress, but as she already had one, she asked if she could have it without. The shop agreed and also delivered it.

However, much to her dismay, Alice found out after the bed had been delivered that it was a different size to her mattress. It was the same length

as a single bed but about two inches wider. What that meant was if you happened to push the mattress to one side, you were likely to kick your shins on the bed frame—which happened a bit. Despite this little hiccup, the bed was ready for Eunice.

Not having seen her mum for about two and a half years, Alice spent a lovely couple of weeks with Eunice doing sewing, cooking, and just spending time together. The reason they had not seen each other for so long is that Alice's mother had remarried and moved interstate, and this was her first visit back to the general area. Not that they hadn't been in contact. Quite the contrary, they had spoken to each other nearly every day since Alice left Tom, which Alice found very comforting. But it was just so much nicer and special to have her mum come and stay and be able to hug her.

While staying with Alice, Eunice loaned her a small amount of money to buy some furniture and things she needed and didn't get through property settlement. This money was a real blessing to Alice. With it, she decked out her unit quite nicely with a brand-new double bed frame for herself, getting her mattress off the floor. She purchased a new bookshelf made by disabled persons from recycled wood from the Salvation Army shop. She also purchased a second-hand wardrobe with a large mirror for the spare bedroom and a large coffee table for the lounge room. Unable to find a nice second-hand chest of drawers, Alice ended up buying a brand-new set from a furniture shop. All these things and much more Alice managed to purchase with the loan from her mother. Alice felt like she could now restart to live her life again instead of just existing.

Although they did most of the shopping for furniture together in a borrowed car, most of it was not going to be delivered until after Eunice went home. So Alice promised to take photos of everything when it was set up and send copies of them to Eunice.

During Eunice's stay, Sally was having more than her usual trouble with her partner. So Sally spent quite a bit of time with them too. This made life a little difficult for all concerned as Sally and Eunice did not get along very well. However, everyone put aside their differences and got along the best they could.

All too soon Eunice's visit was over and she returned home again and Sally's life settled down for a bit and she also returned to her home. This was a very lonely and sad time for Alice. Yes, she had a nice unit which would soon be decked out just the way she wanted it, but she was lonely for company.

Not being allowed pets in her unit, Alice was surprised one day to have a dog barking at her back door. She went to see it and just looked at this little, well-rounded, mostly black dog in her courtyard barking to its heart's content. She opened the door to find the dog very friendly. But whose dog was it? she wondered. Alice decided to go out of her courtyard into the backyard of the property. There she saw an elderly neighbour mowing her lawn. The fence between the two properties was non-existent, so Alice presumed the dog may belong to the old lady. So she walked over to her with the dog following. It was the old lady's dog, who now has the reputation of introducing these two neighbours who became great friends. The old lady's name was May, and her daughter who lived with her was Christine.

This new friendship developed over the years, and these three single ladies—May, Christine and Alice—ended up not only best of friends but went out for regular meals together, special luncheons, birthdays, and even a holiday. They were more like family than friends. These neighbours were the company that Alice so badly needed.

With her unit set up the way she wanted, Alice now had to face going back to her lawyer to sort out property settlement. Then there was the divorce to consider too, but she had to wait a bit longer for that as Tom and she had not yet been separated for twelve months. Although she knew that stressful times were ahead, Alice was ever thankful that she had a nice place to live in.

Chapter 10

Accepting Loss



Property settlement was now in the hands of her lawyer, who advised Alice that it could take anywhere from a few months to over ten years to complete. It all depended on how agreeable Tom would be and/or how much she was prepared to lose. So with nothing much to lose, Alice started negotiations with Tom through the lawyers. This became a very long and drawn-out process.

Being computer savvy, Alice decided to apply for a divorce online so at least that would get something moving. This took a few weeks going back and forth between an Internet cafe and home, acquiring all the required documents, and filling in all the online paperwork. Finally everything was completed and lodged. Then Alice was given the option of several dates to choose for the divorce court case. One of the earliest dates available was 15 December. So Alice took it. When she got home, she realised that was her stepmother's birthday. Not only this, but the divorce would become final on her sister-in-law's birthday, 16 January, and it would be a present for her birthday, the following day! Alice couldn't have picked more memorable dates if she had tried. Alice believes God helped her pick those dates so that she would not look back with sadness on their

memorial but rather celebrate the new freedom that she had found thanks to His wonderful planning and care.

Although getting the divorce over and done with was important for Alice, Tom was furious. When the bailiff delivered the divorce paperwork to him, it was noted that he refused to take it from the bailiff or sign for it. The bailiff had placed it on the veranda for him after confirming his identity, then left. As Alice and Tom had a child under eighteen years of age, they were both supposed to attend the court hearing. Due to her health problems, Alice applied to appear by phone, which was granted. During the court appearance Alice never heard Tom's voice. When the call was over, Alice remembered that after leaving Tom, he had told her that there was no way he was ever going to give her a divorce, so forget it. What Tom didn't take into account was that Alice didn't need his permission; it was the judge's decision, and she readily gave it to Alice.

However, this caused further problems with property settlement. Tom was so furious that Alice managed to divorce him that he started stalling property settlement. Over and over again, he lied to and through his lawyers, and Alice has documented evidence to prove it. Again Tom and Alice agreed through lawyers on goods that he was to give her. Nevertheless, just like the first time, he only gave her about half of what they had agreed on. With a very heavy heart and nearly twelve months after the first proposed property settlement date, Alice decided to concede defeat and accept the loss of many of her possessions that she had owned from childhood, projects that she had worked on—some for thirteen years, all her childhood and teenage photos, as well as special one-off studio photos like her parents before they were married, her parents' wedding photos, and one of herself as a baby. Tom was also supposed to have scanned a copy of all the photos of when he was with Alice, including photos of their children, but this never happened. Moreover, he would only pay her for half of the property—nothing for the three cars, two caravans, trailer, or all the goods he had kept. About twelve months before Alice left, they had received a verbal quote of about \$250,000 for their place; now the best valuation was about half of that.

Signing the paperwork to say that Tom could keep all her things and receiving only half the value of the property was one of the hardest things that Alice ever had to do. However, her lawyer advised her that he felt holding out any longer would not get her anything more. So with tears

streaming from her eyes, her lips quivering, and her hand shaking, she signed that paperwork. Her lawyer's office was closing down due to her lawyer being ill. He told her that Tom's lawyer would send her paperwork and a check for property settlement. When he did so, Alice was to pay her lawyer's account directly into his bank account.

What a horrible stupid mess everything had become. Despite all this, Alice felt she ended up far better off than Tom. Her home, although rented, was neat, tidy, and tastefully furnished. She had family and friends who loved her and wanted to spend time with her. But above all, Alice has peace in her heart that she had done the right thing—even before God. Alice had a contentment that surpassed anything that goods and money could buy. Yet God was not finished with her yet.

Chapter 11

Another Car



Getting the property settlement agreement through the lawyers was only the first step. Alice still had to wait for the money. She was patiently waiting for her money before she tried to buy another car. Eunice knew how much Alice needed a car, but Alice just kept on insisting that she wanted to wait.

Alice had looked around at new cars and had decided that a little Hyundai would be a good car. Having only bought second-hand cars in the past and knowing how badly she could get ripped off doing so, Alice wanted to buy a new car. But as property settlement was dragging on and on over months, her patience was wearing thin. Also using public transport and taxis, which were rather expensive, were risky with her health problems. A number of times, Alice nearly had to disembark from a bus due to the smell of chemicals that someone was wearing. Mostly, however, she just felt quite sick by the time she arrived home from doing any business or shopping.

Around this time and much to Alice's delight, Sally had given birth to a lovely little boy, Luke. However, because he was so overdue when born,

he had many health problems—mostly to do with his lungs. Often Alice would walk to Sally’s place and stay for a few days to help look after little Luke. At one stage, he had to be held all night to make sure he kept breathing. Luke’s father said he couldn’t do it, so Sally had done it two nights in a row as well as during the day. At the end of this time, Sally had phoned and asked Alice to help. Alice was glad to be able to help, but without a car, this was not easy.

Eunice, bless her heart and that of her husband, decided she could not wait for Alice to get her property settlement money and that she needed a car now! So one day, Eunice phoned Alice telling her she had loaned her \$5,000 and it was in her bank account. Eunice firmly told Alice that she was to go and look for a second-hand car and buy one.

What on earth could I get for \$5,000? wondered Alice. Would it be suitable for her allergies? How was she going to get to the car yard? These and many more questions ran through her mind. Not even sure what brand of car to look for, she phoned up Ultra Tune, which had helped her out previously. She talked to the man, telling him how she was looking for a second-hand car and the money she had. Then she asked him what type of car would be the best and approximately what age would be the best. Alice also asked about how to get a check-up done on the car to make sure it was OK. The man from Ultra Tune answered all her questions and told her to look for a Toyota or Nissan as they would be her best bet for getting a decent car.

Making a list of all the second-hand car yards in the phone book and armed with the information from Ultra Tune, Alice started to phone around. She told the first salesman she wanted a car—Toyota or Nissan—automatic, with a drive away price of \$5,000, nothing more. The salesman said he wasn’t sure if they had anything but said he would phone her back if they did.

As the salesman sounded so unsure and this was the first car yard she had phoned, Alice decided to phone another couple of numbers. These salesmen either had nothing in that price range or wanted to try and sell Alice a different brand of car. They just did not seem to get it through their head that all she wanted was either a Toyota or Nissan. They would offer Holden, Ford, Hyundai, etc., but never Toyota or Nissan. Feeling disappointed and frustrated, Alice took a break.

Then the first salesman phoned her back saying they had just received a Toyota Camry as a trade-in the night before that might be suitable. He said they had not looked at it yet or cleaned it. Alice quickly seized the opportunity and asked him not to clean it or she would be allergic to the chemicals. So the car was not cleaned. Alice also arranged for the salesman to bring the car to her place to see it and take it for a test drive. Alice looked over the car while the salesman told her all the details about the vehicle. At one stage, the salesman jumbled things up a bit and Alice stopped and queried him, knowing that what he had said didn't make sense. At that moment, the salesman knew Alice knew more than she let on, so he watched everything he said.

Taking the car for a test drive was the highlight of Alice's day. The car was really quiet, had good acceleration, drove well, and even had a good functioning air conditioner, something Alice and Tom's car never had. This car also had far more extras on it than Alice was used to, but she was thrilled by the way it just effortlessly glided along the road. They went back to the sales yard, and Alice made the deal and signed the papers subject to an Ultra Tune check. The check showed there were a few things that needed doing but the salesman agreed to do them.

After a few minor hassles, Alice managed to buy herself a fourteen-year-old Toyota Camry that was suitable for her allergies, with two new tires, six months registration, plus a few other things, and at the drive away price of only \$5,000! Being an older car meant it would require some repairs over time but most cars do. However, even today, it is still a good car, in good working order, and everyone who drives it says how nice it is to drive. This is something Alice totally agrees with.

Eunice was also very pleased with the car and liked the look of it from the first photos she saw. Every time she came to Alice's place and saw the car, she would say, "That sure is a nice-looking car."

Over the first few months of owning this car, Alice would often look at it with disbelief, and a tear of joy would well up in her eyes, that she owned such a nice car. After years of driving very old, half broken down cars that were never fixed properly and broke down at the most inopportune times, she finally owned a car that looked nice, worked properly, and that she could just get in and drive.

How often do you hear of a single woman starting life on her own achieving something like this with a second-hand car? Most times, women are taken for a bad ride, which is sad. Alice knew God definitely had a hand in acquiring this particular car for her, and she thanks Him often for it.

God's hand was in Alice buying this particular vehicle in more ways than she first realised. The colour of her car was never an issue for Alice, though she would have liked something a little louder. Yet nearly everyone that knew Alice and saw her car said they really liked the colour, so over time, it grew on her. The major thing about the car was that it was big! Alice had only wanted a small car that would be more economical. However, this big car proved necessary and a blessing.

When Sally married her partner, Alice was able to carry a lot of items they required to the park wedding in her car. Also when travelling, most of Alice's cases and other items that she required fitted in the boot. This was a huge benefit as Alice found out she was allergic to the smell of most suitcases and other things she needed when travelling. If Alice had purchased the little car she wanted, she would never have been able to do any of the travelling she did to see her family. God truly works in mysterious ways and often gives us what we need rather than what we want.

The timing for getting this car could not have been better either. Sally's Luke was about six months old and now very sick. He had been sick on and off since he was born, and now only a couple of days after Alice bought her car, he was admitted to hospital again. Sally and her partner did not have a working car, so Alice was able to assist with transport and help by visiting Sally and encouraging her during Luke's stay in hospital.

When Eunice found out about Luke's hospital stay and how thankful Alice was to have the car, she was glad that she had insisted on loaning Alice money to buy it. She had been impressed to do so, not really knowing why. Now they all understood that God had been organising things His way and in His own time.

Chapter 12

A Different Perspective



Shortly after leaving Tom, Alice started asking herself many questions like, Who am I? What do I want in life? What do I want to do with my life? What do I like? What don't I like? How could she answer questions like these when she was over forty years old and never been allowed to have her own opinion? Where and how could she start to find the answer to these questions? She was soon to find out, and the answers would give her a totally different perspective on life.

One day during a counselling session at the women's shelter, the counsellor advised Alice to read a book entitled *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* by John Bradshaw. She felt it would help Alice a lot. In this book, John Bradshaw explains his revolutionary method which helps people to find their inner child. He believes that during childhood and teenage years, many people are wounded and that these wounds affect people right into their adult life. Using his methods, he proposes that people can reach the child within, healing these wounds. These methods do not include blaming others but simply acknowledging how you felt and then offering comfort to your inner child. In this way, it

allows you to stay connected with your inner child while letting the adult move on and grow.

Reading this book and doing some of the exercises in it opened up a lot of old wounds that Alice had, but it also helped to heal them, and she could see herself for who she was and why she was like that. It also invigorated her inner child, allowing her to appreciate and enjoy more fully the simple things in life like watching clouds, birds, trees swaying in the breeze, and flowers.

Also for many years, Alice had a very strange reaction when people touched her in a certain way, and she could not explain why until doing these exercises. It was then that she remembered something that had happened nearly thirty years before and had terrified her so much that she pushed it to the back of her mind in an attempt to forget it. However, whenever someone touched her in the same way as back then, she would react. Her conscious mind had forgotten, but her subconscious mind had not. By remembering what had happened, Alice was able to remove a lot of her sensitivity to that certain touch.

Taking one day at a time and by trial-and-error experimentation, Alice slowly rediscovered who she was as a person or individual. She also learnt about a lot of things that she did and did not like, which she found was an ongoing experience. Some of these things she was learning about without even realising it. Like buying new clothes that were totally different from the style and colour that she used to wear and choosing a washing machine and fridge that even Sally didn't like.

Alice had found a unit to live in and made it her own home. She ate what she liked, when she liked, and if she didn't like something she cooked, she threw it out and never cooked it again. She borrowed free DVDs to watch from the local library to help her discover what type of movies she liked. Alice also participated in local activities with Sally's help, like Carols by Candlelight and the local Christmas pageant to find out if she would like them, which she did.

However, trying to find out what she wanted in life and to do with her life were harder questions for her to answer. Having little self-confidence was a big drawback for her. She was always worried what other people thought about her and what she did or said, and because of years of

criticism, she felt she was ugly, stupid, and unlovable. Somehow, she knew she needed to take control of her life, not be scared to make decisions even if they turn out to be the wrong ones, love herself for who she was, and acknowledge the special things she could do. But how could she do this?

Then one summer's day, while doing some shopping with Sally, Alice read an advertisement on the noticeboard for a workshop entitled "Equipping for Equity" being run by a local counselling office. It was designed to help women who were in or had been in a domestically violent relationship. However, the workshop had already come and gone but a seed had been sown in Alice's mind. Sometime later, Alice contacted the counselling office and asked if they were running that course again. They were, so she put her name down for the workshop, not sure what she was getting herself into.

It was about eighteen months after Alice had left Tom that she started this workshop of discovery. Discovery? Yes, for to be able to move forward from domestic violence, you first need to discover your beliefs and values, where they came from, and decide if they are still relevant and whether you still want them. During this eight-week workshop (only about three hours, one day a week), Alice made some friends. This was a very valuable experience for her and helped her to reach out to other people. The presenter of this workshop also stated that she believed that some of those ladies would end up doing further study or a university course. Alice knew two of the ladies already were, so that meant the presenter was quite possibly talking about her. *What nonsense*, she thought.

As she went through this workshop, Alice's self-confidence grew, and for the first time in many years, she started to make plans for things she wanted to do. Contacting a local counselling service that helped rape victims and their family, Alice made an appointment. Sally had previously used this service and recommended it to Alice as one that might help her also. The counselling sessions that Alice attended were exactly what she needed. At the end of each session, the counsellor gave her a project to do for the next session. Then one day, she presented Alice with a special journal which was usually only supplied to those who participated in the equine therapy that this service offered. After completing a few sections in the journal, the counsellor asked Alice if she wanted to take part in the next series of equine therapy sessions. Alice accepted within a heartbeat even though she was scared to be in the same paddock as a horse.

Over the next few months, Alice completed the equine therapy, making even more friends. She mostly lost her fear of being in the same paddock as a horse and learnt many valuable lessons. One of these was about her fears. An obstacle course had been laid out with three obstacles. The first was simple, the second was a little more prominent, and the third one was rather large. Each person had to lead a horse through the obstacle course thinking about a fear for each obstacle. When Alice led the horse to the first obstacle, the horse ignored it. At the second one, the horse nudged it and then walked on. At the largest obstacle, which was one of Alice's largest fears, the horse destroyed it and then trampled on it. Alice interpreted this as the horse saying her fears were really nothing to worry about, and Alice has seldom worried about any of them since.

The counselling office was running several other workshops too, which Alice took part in. She discovered that she had a certain knack with words, a wicked sense of humour, and a deep empathy for people who had gone through similar things to herself. There was also a longing in her heart to help other women who had or were suffering in domestically violent relationships. The big question was how? Only time would tell.

During her counselling sessions, Alice discussed many things that she had never told anyone else before. Some of these things were harder for her to discuss than others. One of the hardest things she talked about was a story she had been told about her childhood. After discussing this story with her counsellor, they both agreed that Alice had probably been sexually assaulted as a young child. Not remembering anything of the incident herself, only the story, the counsellor advised Alice to accept it as something that happened and let it go which she did.

Although this discussion was difficult, there were a couple other issues that were even harder for Alice to discuss. They are so closely intertwined that Alice considered them as one. One of these issues was Alice's suspicion for a few years that Tom was having an affair. The reason for this suspicion was that sometimes when Alice and Tom were making love, Tom would say the oddest of things like he was comparing her to someone else. Apart from this, Alice had no reason to suspect Tom, so she just put them down to silly comments. However, when Sally had phoned Alice the morning that she left Tom, Alice realised that the other woman was in fact Sally. This fact tortured Alice, and to finally be able to talk about it with someone brought about a huge relief.

Alice also discussed how years before she had been told of allegations that Tom had sexually assaulted one of his daughters. But knowing that Tom has three daughters and only one was making allegations just did not ring true. However, finding out that all four of his daughters, one of their friends, a niece, plus numerous others also claimed that Tom had sexually assaulted them all, had changed her mind. Not only this, but some of the allegations as to what he did and how he did it rang very true for Alice and how Tom had treated her. Putting everything that she knew now together, Alice did not have a shadow of a doubt in her mind that all the allegations were 100 per cent true and discussed this with her counsellor.

The counsellor told Alice that the greatest evidence that she could have given to show everyone she believed the allegations was to leave Tom, which she had done. She also comforted Alice with the fact that we can only deal with the information that we have at that point in time. Hindsight can sometimes be a blessing, but it can also be a curse because you see pieces of the puzzle that you missed and wonder how you did so. Being so close to a situation also makes it harder to see. With Alice leaving Tom and putting distance both physically and emotionally between them, Alice was able to see things more clearly. She also had time to stop, think, and reflect.

The counsellor also advised Alice to read several books showing people's choices which seemed unexplainable until you knew more about their life. These books helped Alice to put her own choices in life into perspective and stop wishing she could go back and change things, which is something nobody can do. She learnt to accept the past as something that happened and make changes to her life today so that she had a brighter outlook for her future.

One of those changes was something Alice had wanted since her early twenties. It was a glass display cabinet. She had put off buying one with her property settlement money because she didn't know if she was going to meet someone nice and then she might have to get rid of it. Then after one of the workshops at the counselling office, she decided that to prove to herself that she was worth having nice things, she would go out and buy one. Alice looked through several furniture shops before finding something that she liked. However, she was not sure if she liked it or it was something she would have picked because Tom would have liked it. It had turned posts down both front corners and the timber had a reddish tint to it, two

things Tom always liked. So Alice left the shop thinking about what decision she would make.

A week or so later she went back to the same shop to see if the cabinet was still there. As she turned down the aisle where it had been, her breath was taken away by how lovely this cabinet really was. She talked to the owner of the shop asking if he could do some extra polishing/sealing work on it for her so it did not cause her allergies back home. He said that would not be a problem as they build their own cupboards there too and they could store it for a couple of weeks to let it detoxify a bit before delivering it. Alice paid for it and waited.

Two weeks later, Alice phoned up about the cabinet and agreed on a mutually suitable date. When it arrived, she found out it was actually a buffet unit and a glass display cabinet with the cabinet sitting on the buffet unit. The delivery men set it up in the lounge for her, and Alice was delighted with it. Everyone that came to her home loved it. Whenever Alice was really sick and felt like she had nothing to live for, she would look at that cabinet and remember that she was a lot better off than she used to be, that she had people who loved her, and that she had a lot to live for.

Around the time Alice was asking herself how she could help other women who had or were suffering in domestically violent relationships, there was a career expo being held in her local area. Alice went along and looked at everything that there was to offer. The only thing that caught her eye was maybe a social worker which would require further education. Then she came across the local university stand. She made enquiries about doing something like a bridging course and if she could do that at home. Alice was given the phone number for the disability officer who could help her with all her disabilities, application forms for STEPS which was like the old bridging course, and was informed that completing the course via distance education was something this university offered.

After reading all the information and completing all the forms the best she could, Alice phoned the university to make an appointment to see the disability officer. This lady was amazed at how organised Alice was and very glad that she had filled in the paperwork as much as she had. She sent the application to study STEPS off for Alice and told Alice she should receive a letter and phone call soon to let her know if she was successful.

Upon receiving the acceptance phone call from the STEPS coordinator, Alice could not help but laugh. She had scoffed at the counselling office presenter for saying that some of them would end up doing further education or a university course, and that is exactly what Alice was now planning on doing. She also phoned Eunice and Sally to share her good news.

Completing the STEPS course was challenging mentally as well and physically for Alice. However, she learnt an awful lot about herself, the skills she had developed over the years, some of her special talents, but mostly that she was not stupid but a rather smart lady. At the completion of the STEPS course for which she did four subjects, she achieved three high distinctions and one distinction!

What an achievement for Alice! This above everything else really boosted Alice's self-confidence and gave her a totally different perspective on life.

Chapter 13

A Better Life



Many people hope for and dream of a better life, a life filled with happiness, contentment, and no stress. But would that type of life really be better? Then again, what is happiness or contentment? If we do not know what makes a better life, then how can we ever know if we have achieved it? Life will always be full of ups and downs, happiness and sadness, stress and relaxation. If we do not have any sadness, anger, pain, stress, etc. in our lives, we will not realise how much there is of or appreciate the happiness, love, wellness, relaxation, etc.

The trick is to work out the best real life you can expect to have. Through doing numerous workshops at a local counselling office, Alice pursued this best real life for herself. Some of these workshops included “Laughter, Fun, and Play”; “Effective Communication”; “Cool, Calm, and Collected” (about being resilient and de-stressing); “Mindfulness”; “Thanks but No Thanks” (about being assertive); “I Am Me and I’m OK” (about accepting yourself for who you are and what you look like); “Self-Compassion” (about being kind and compassionate to yourself); “Respectful Relationships”; and “Strong Not Tough”.

Through these workshops, Alice discovered that self-improvement or the best real life is a continual process. One of the first things she learnt is

that you have to love yourself before you can truly accept love from others. This includes accepting all compliments graciously and not brushing them off, and accepting how you look. How Alice saw herself and some of the judgements others have made about her were not necessarily true. She needed to stop being so critical about her abilities and looks and learn to accept and love herself just as she was.

Effective communication is another essential tool that Alice learnt because in life if you are to get along with other humans, you need to communicate. God gave human beings two ears and one mouth, some say in an attempt to emphasise the fact that we should listen twice as much as we speak. Most people need to learn to listen properly not to be able to give an answer to the person or offer advice, but simply to understand what the other person is trying to tell them. If this happened more often, there would be fewer arguments from misunderstandings. A lot of people also need to learn how to say no, strongly and firmly, without being rude. This would have a huge impact on many lives like it did for Alice.

However, she also found out that life is not just about acceptance and communicating effectively, it is also about having fun! The Bible tells us in Proverbs 15:13 that “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.” Having a good laugh not only lifts your spirit, but it also improves your immune system and general health. Psychologists have learnt that having fun and laughing every day is essential for a healthy, balanced life. This simple tip that Alice learnt is not as simple as it sounds when you try to practice it every day. But when she did, the difference in her life was amazing.

Another important life skill she learnt was mindfulness, which is really being mindful of what is around you and letting go of stress and anger, and forgiving yourself and others for wrongs that have been done. Alice learnt different ways to be mindful with one way being to stop, sit still, relax, and listen to all the noises around her. Another was to sit and relax, looking in one direction and taking note of every single thing she could see. Letting go of stress and anger she did through closing her eyes and visualising these things floating on large leaves on a slow moving, winding river. As they disappeared out of sight, she felt more relaxed and with the help of God was able to forgive others for the wrongs they had done her and, more importantly, forgive herself for the mistakes and wrongs she had done.

A healthy diet, exercise, rest, and taking time out and doing something special for herself were also emphasised in these workshops. Alice learnt that these things did not have to be complicated. A healthy or healthier diet could be as simple as exchanging soft drink and juices for water and whole grains instead of white. Exercise could be anything you liked doing, such as riding a bike, walking, jogging, running, or even swimming. Liking a variety of these things, Alice varied her exercise to what she felt like on the day, but always aimed for thirty minutes of exercise a day. Getting a good night's sleep was usually easy for Alice. For her something special, Alice chose two things—one that could be done at home when she was not overly well and the other one she went out for. The former was making a nice cup of tea in a special antique cup she rarely used and then taking this outside where she had placed as special doily and ornaments. She then sat quietly, slowly drinking her tea while letting go of any troubles she had. The latter was walking along the beach in the water during the warmer months or along the pathways when it was colder. Alice found these walks exhilarating and relaxing at the same time, and the salty air and water also helped to improve her health.

The most important thing of all that Alice learnt through these workshops and her counselling sessions was to be herself. To stop worrying about what other people were thinking about her or judging her for. Just being the kind of person that made her happy without causing others harm or pain. This in itself brought a lot of self-confidence to Alice, and quite frankly, nobody could honestly tell her she was doing it wrong because only Alice could truly be Alice!

These were by no means the only things Alice learnt while attending the workshops. To find out more about them, she recommends that anyone who has the time should make enquiries in their local area about such workshops and attend them. The skills learnt in the workshops, when applied, are life-changing. Over the time that Alice did these workshops, she saw how others that she knew changed, and they saw and commented on how much she had changed too.

One of the requirements that Alice, along with the other attendants at the workshops, had to agree not to do before they could participate is judge other people for their decisions. Alice quickly learnt that listening to the current circumstances that someone found themselves in gave no indication of what they had been through in the past. And someone's past

nearly always has a bearing on why they make the decisions they do. Alice found that she not only had sympathy for the other attendants but empathy as she had been through similar situations. This only heightened her desire to help others in like situations.

A significant lesson that Alice learnt through these workshops is that change is good. If the caterpillar refused change, it would never become a beautiful butterfly. However, change is not always easy. Alice spent about three and a half years after leaving Tom yearning for her things that she had left behind. She had been banging on a door that was closed, trying to reopen it. Finally accepting the loss of her belongings that she had treasured, especially all the items she had made for the children's Sabbath school classes, gave her an inner peace, and she could remember those things without the pain. Alice finally accepted that maybe God wanted her to move on and not do children's Sabbath school any more but something different. But what? Alice did not know.

More and more, Alice found that often when she watched a movie or read a book or part of one, it contained something that brought encouragement to her. Since leaving Tom, Alice had slowly been reading one book in particular. Yet each time she picked up this book, the chapter she read contained words from God that she needed in her life right at the moment. God always knows what we are going through, and before we ask, He will answer our prayers (Isaiah 65:24). He knows best what we need and how to help us have a realistic better life.

Enjoying the simple things in life like walking along the beach or around some quiet streets, Alice mostly focuses on what she could do, although this was not always the case. One time she had to fill out a whole heap of paperwork for a dental specialist that she was going to see. After filling three A4 pieces of paper with the information about her different health problems, Alice became quite sad. She hadn't realised quite how difficult life had become for her to live or have others around her. Thankfully this sadness was short-lived, and Alice bounced back to her usual happy self.

Despite how difficult her life can be a times, Alice is 100 per cent convinced that it is still a far better life than the one she left years ago. She was happier, healthier, went out more, and enjoyed the company of other people. All in all, Alice had achieved a better life.

Chapter 14

God's Timing



King Solomon says in Ecclesiastes 3:1, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:”. In looking back throughout her life, but more especially the last decade or so, Alice saw God’s timing in her life and has shared some of these experiences with you here.

However, it was not always clear to her at the time as to why things were happening the way they were or when the right time to move was. She found that being close to God by reading and studying His Word, the Bible, and through much prayer, she would often hear a still small voice prompting her to do things, or she would simply find that a door opened that she never knew was there. There were even times when people she didn’t know helped her through these opened doors.

There were also many, many times when Alice found herself stressed out and weary from bashing on a closed door trying to break it down. Only to finally realise that what was behind that door was not part of God’s plan for her life any more. He had other plans and dreams for her to fulfil, plans and dreams that would inspire others and were beyond her wildest dreams.

Alice had partially learnt the lesson spoken of in Psalm 37:7, “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him ...”

Why had she only partially learnt this lesson? Alice believes that this lesson is part of a Christian’s daily walk and a lesson that must be renewed each day. For every day God has a wondrous plan for our lives if we will only accept it and do according to His will. To do this, we need to submit our lives to the will of God every single day. This does not mean that life will be all wonderful and happy, but it does mean we will have every opportunity that we can possibly have to improve our character and show God that we love Him above everyone and everything else. There is a promise about this found in Isaiah 30:20 and 21, “And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This *is* the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”

By gladly accepting the trials, adversities, and afflictions sent our way and learning patience, humility, godliness, etc., from these, we will also learn to hear the words “This is the way, walk ye in it”. There is nothing worse than being all alone, totally lost, and not knowing what to do. Yet if we are faithful to God, He will always be with us, guiding our steps and even holding our hands as we pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

In preparing this book, Alice hoped that others too would see God’s work in her life and maybe in their own life as well. That others would see that God’s ways are not the same as man’s ways, and that He will never leave or forsake anyone who truly loves and follows Him (Isaiah 55:8; Hebrews 13:5).

In closing, Alice would like to share one more scripture promise with you:

Wait on the LORD:
be of good courage,
and he shall strengthen thine heart:
wait, I say, on the LORD.

(Psalm 27:14)

Appendix A

What Is Domestic and Family Violence?



Domestic and family violence occurs when the behaviour of one individual towards another individual, within a relevant relationship, is abusive or violent with the intent to control or cause fear in the second individual.

These relevant relationships are an intimate personal relationships, such as engaged, de facto or married couples; a family relationships, such as between two individuals who are or have been related by blood or marriage; or informal care relationship, such as if one person is helping with activities of daily life for another person within a private home.

These behaviours may affect the second individual in such a way as to cause fear for their or another person's safety, wellbeing, or life. After a period of time, a pattern usually appears in this continuing behaviour which the second individual can identify.

Domestic and family violence can happen to you irrespective of your age, gender, religion, culture, race, financial status, sexual orientation, abilities or disabilities, or the length of time you have been in your relationship. Therefore it is recommended that every individual should be aware of what domestic and family violence entails and be vigilant in any relationship, and constantly ask themselves if they feel safe and respected. If the answer is “No”, then seeking help is advisable.

Why? As an individual, you have the right to:

- To be treated as your partner’s equal in importance, and with your physical and emotional needs.
- Your own opinions, to voice them without ridicule or judgment even if the other individual does not agree with them.
- Choose the pace of your relationship which you feel comfortable with, including if or when any sexual activities occur which should be both agreed to and respected by your partner.
- Be treated decently without abuse.

Violence and abuse can include:

Damaging property to cause fear – like deliberately throwing or smashing personal items or furniture, and punching holes in walls or doors.

Denying your basic needs - like food, shelter and medical care.

Economic or financial – like controlling your money, making you give your money to them, and not leaving you with enough or giving you enough money to survive.

Emotional or psychological – like insulting, demeaning, humiliating, and threatening you, your personality, looks and skills, or that of your children.

Intimidation – like defining treatment because of sex or authoritative position on the other partner, then enforcing this

treatment with looks, actions and gestures causing fear if non-compliance occurs.

Isolation – like determining who and when you see or talk to other people, what your reading material can be, and places you go.

Harassment and stalking – like continually contacting you by phone or social media, and following you physically, through social media or using Global Positioning Systems (GPS).

Physical – like pushing, kicking, choking, slapping, hitting and using weapons.

Sexual – like any sexual act or behaviour not fully agreed to by both partners over the age of sixteen, any such activities with someone under sixteen years, any unwelcome or rude sexual touch, rape, indecent assaults, and making someone against their will watch pornography.

Social – like making you live in an isolated location against your will, limiting or stopping access to family and friends, and generally isolating you.

Spiritual/Cultural – like compelling you to be present and participate at religious meetings or gatherings, and preventing you from participating in your cultural or religious activities.

Threats and coercion – like threatening that if you don't do what they want they will - harm you, your children, people you know, pets, or personal property; lock you in a room or the house; stop caring for you (especially when they are your carer); reveal your sexual orientation to others contrary to your will; and harm themselves or commit suicide.

Verbal – like cursing, swearing, yelling, shouting, screaming at you.

Indications that domestic and family violence may be occurring are:

- A partner who repeatedly alleges they are having an affair or constantly checking up on them.
- Frequency of seeing family and friends is significantly reduced and becomes isolating.
- If someone suspects they are being followed or stalked.
- Trying to hide injuries and bruises under out-of-season or oversized clothing.
- If someone seems scared of an individual close to them.
- If someone is not comfortable with their partner looking after the children.
- An individual has limited or no say about how their money is spent.
- If someone loses confidence, is uncharacteristically quiet or depressed.
- If a disabled or older person shows signs that suggest lack of care.

If you become aware that either you or someone you know are in a domestic or family violent relationship, please seek professional help through a local support services, counselling or your doctor.

The material in this article is based on information found at:

State of Queensland (Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services), “What Is Domestic and Family Violence”, <<http://www.communities.qld.gov.au/communityservices/violence-prevention/about-domestic-and-family-violence-prevention/what-is-domestic-and-family-violence.htm>> last updated 23 September 2014, viewed 6 February 2015.

State of Queensland (Queensland Police Service) 2012, “What Is Domestic Violence”, <<http://www.police.qld.gov.au/programs/cscp/dv/whatDomViolc.htm>> last updated 25 August 2014, viewed 6 February 2015.

Appendix B

A Selection of Poems and Short Stories

about domestic violence and associated issues

written by Kym Miller



Lies of a Diseased Mind

There are some who tell such horrible lies
With twisted tales and riddles like that of spies.
Yet these lies are not the truth you'll find
But are real only within a diseased man's mind.

These lies to many people he did ardently tell
Some here, some there, and over there as well.
He was so convincing that most of you believed
All the horrible things his diseased mind did conceive.

You may look at me, you may stare,
You may chatter about a much claimed affair.
You may believe every vicious lie he did state
And believe his actions towards me were my fate.

You have taken these lies as absolute truth
Not knowing what happened under our roof.
He was once a kind, honest, and loving man
Whose mind was changed into a conspiracy fan.

The horrible lies he spoke, so harsh and cruel
Still ring in my mind like a fighting duel.
I know they are not true, but how do you fight
The lies of one who is in such a terrible plight?

Although he passed away, I must still live
And the lies he once told, life you still give.
If you will not accept the honest truth about me
Then my dear friends, please, just let me be.

Money, Money

Money, money, wherever are you?
I need to pay an account and bill or two.
What have you done with all the money?
I had expenses of my very own, honey.

It really is not fair on us, dear father.
Why don't you save some of that, rather?
You well know I don't wear that hat!
I gamble money on this and on that.

Tell me, honey, for what reason are you concerned
If all the money I spend is more than I earned.
For you, my dear, will make up the difference
That is your way, your duty, my dependence.

Now the new roof on our house is leaking
And most of the wood is cracking and creaking.
The builder said he would come back and mend
But has not done so properly, on whom can I depend?

The money is gone, so we ourselves cannot fix
And the builder is now taking no blame into the mix.
I phone and send letters and emails to all I can locate
But all seems to pass the buck or me humiliate.

Oh why, dear father, will you not your family assist
By curbing your gambling and give away urge, resist?
The accounts and bills are piling up by the score.
Please, oh father, we need your money much more.

Tick Tock

Tick tock went the clock that hung upon the wall,
A very common sound that most of us recall.
But to her this sound brought great distress
For it reminded her of a dim dark recess.

He was older than she, how much I know not
But he used to sexually abuse her a lot.
They played a game to see who would win
The loser had to do the winner's whim.

Hold your breath for as long as you can
See if you can beat me, don't spoil my plan.
She would hold her breath as long as she could
With a clock going tick tock as it should.

Of course she had no hope of winning
But it was all part of his devious planning.
Then all because she lost this horrible game
She was made to do whatever he would name.

She began to dread and fear a clock's sound
And tried to remove them when found.
For this common sound was a relentless reminder
Of the abuse dished out by her usual minder.

Arguing and Fighting

We argue here, we argue there,
What an argumentative pair!
You fight with me, I'll fight with you.
What on earth are we going to do?

Don't listen to me, I won't listen to you.
We will just talk over each other too.
We'll fight about this and that for main.
I didn't hear what you said again.

You horrible thing, you said this about me.
I said nothing like that, just let me be.
We really do love each other you know,
Just sometimes we don't let it show.

We get tired and irritable and in pain,
Now we start fighting all over again.
You blame me and I blame you,
Who else is there to put the blame to?

So on we go with this merry-go-round
Till a solution to this problem is found.
But how to fix this dreadful mess?
We don't know, we must confess.

Colours Bring to Mind

Naming a colour often brings things to mind,
So let's name a few and see what we find.
Red we associated with heat and the sun,
Fire and cooking, now this is so much fun.

Cooling is blue which colours water and sky,
But these things change colour as the day goes by.
Green is the lush grass and many trees so tall,
But flowers can be nearly any colour at all.

There are sets of colours, so many you will find,
Which bring quite different things to your mind.
Like black and white for dark lies and true reality,
They can also define two ethnic groups in society.

But when we say someone is black and blue,
We know for sure they have a bruise or two.
But bruises have so many different sources,
Just like the different colours a bruise causes.

When you've been hit, it starts out really red,
But you know it will change soon, that you dread.
It turns black, blue, and purple of different hues,
And people start asking questions or for clues.

You try to hide these new colours of yours
That someone you love dearly did cause.
You hide in shame what has really been done
By a half truth or lie that comes off your tongue.

You would like people to know what came to pass
And seek out help instead of living this farce.
For your partner the horrible truth you do hide,
So you're not punished for hurting his or her pride.

Second-Hand Smoking

Most people who smoke tobacco cannot tell
That its smell lingers on and around them well,
Tainting all things around when smoking indoors
And eventually coming out of their skin's pores.

Most people have known quite a lot about
All the diseases smoking causes like gout,
Major heart problems, and cancers of various kinds,
But there is something quite different on my mind.

Young children who are so small and still growing
Need clean fresh air to keep them glowing.
To fill their air with poisons from smoke,
My friends, it can make some of them choke.

You may not see what the smoke is doing today,
But how will you feel if a doctor should say
That your poor child has an incurable malady
Simply because you smoked in their company?

Will you look back with horror and shame
And wish you could live your life over again?
But to what has been done we can make no alteration.
We must accept it now and think of future modification.

So the next time you light up inside or out,
Stop for a moment and think who else is about.
Will you cause someone else's health to falter
Because of a bad habit you didn't want to alter?

One Drink Too Many

Hey! I'm going down the pub for a drink or two,
Would you like to come along with me too?
I will never say no to that, my dear friend,
So don't think your asking will ever offend.

Having had a drink or maybe seven or eight,
Now the hour of night is getting quite late.
We should go home, better rest before work,
Or they will call me names like a jerk.

We both climb into the car only to find
We are both in the back, oh never mind.
I will drive home, I'm not as drunk as you.
Now where on earth did the gear stick get to?

I'll drive really slow so the cops don't guess,
But I drove off the road, what a terrible mess.
"Who was driving when you hit that tree?"
We don't know, we're too drunk, you see.

Not sure how but somehow I make it home
And fall asleep on the grass beside the gnome.
Sun up, my head is thumping and I feel lazy,
Now my wife and kids are driving me crazy.

I yell and shout and knock them all about
All because of the drink for which I went out.
No food in the house but many bills to pay,
Oh dear, I am in for such a terrible day.

To work I must go to earn a couple of bucks
And hope there are changes to my luck.
Another week over and I receive my pay,
I think I ring up my mate and say, Hey!

Smiling Again

Hey! What you smiling about, are you insane?
Are you telling yourself stupid jokes again?
Don't you know that laughing is not right?
It shows you are possessed by Satan's might!

Why are you so emotional and crying?
It is just another dumb animal that is dying!
Just because it was one of your many pets
Doesn't mean you should fret or have regrets!

You tell me shouting at the kids isn't right,
So why are you yelling at me in this fight?
I did do something that wasn't nice again,
But it's not my fault, nor will I take blame!

For years I lived with this type of commotion,
Never being allowed to show any emotion.
Life without smiles and laughter is gloomy,
But not being allowed to cry is not easy.

This cruel, hard life I have left far behind me
By reclaiming my life and personal liberty.
Now I smile a lot more and heartily laugh too,
Expressing myself freely whenever I want to.

Transformation at a Workshop

Sitting at the table and slumped in a chair,
She had a clear look on her face of despair.
She could not read for her glasses had broken,
So not a written word from her was spoken.

Timid and shy and mentally battered was she
Who came to learn how to be strong and free.
Could this happen in four short weeks?
Maybe, because on day one a smile did peek.

Amazingly she was cheeky and witty and full of fun,
With the odd comment here and another of pun.
She loved tomatoes, especially the cherry type,
And the rest of us laughed to see her hype.

So clearly changes through the workshop piled,
Even more so when she sat up and smiled.
Her eyes lit up, and her face clearly shone,
All the original traces of despair were gone.

This was only day one of the workshop, my friend.
Just think what she will be like by the very end.
Day two and three brought more fun and changes
To all these people who were once strangers.

Cherry tomatoes were the constant request by her,
Which would cause the room to fill with laughter.
Her smile broadened, and she talked a lot more,
Coming out of her shell to learn and explore.

At last, the final day did eventually arrive.
What joys, fun, or mischief would she devise?
To a cheer and applause she read some words written
And clearly to this appreciation she was smitten.

She left standing tall with a huge smile and a hug
Inside she had changed too and felt really smug.
This is the difference a small workshop can create
For those who put in the effort a transformation to make.

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