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Bags of blessings

Young girl uses brain tumor experience to bring comfort to others

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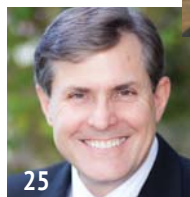
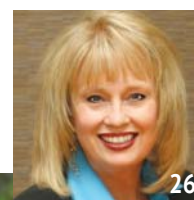


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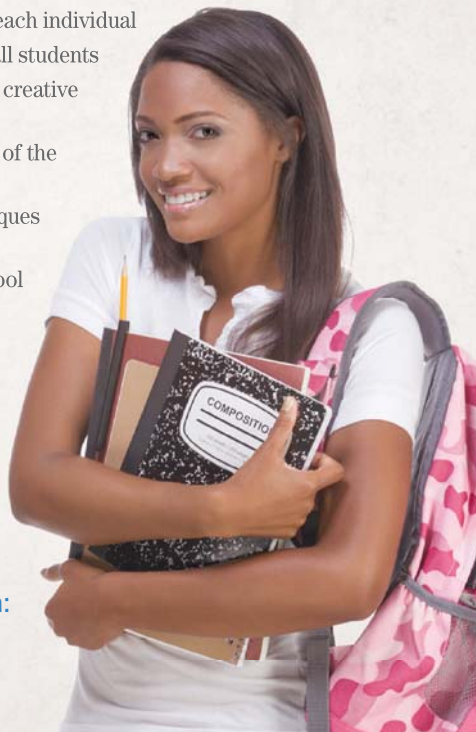
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Grace at work—even in tragedy

When the National Desk of *The New York Times* called me several years ago and asked if I could hurry to a high school in San Diego that had experienced a shooting, my heart sank.

One reason my heart sank was that the shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado had occurred just two years before, and I thought, “Here we go again. Why does this keep happening?”

The second reason was that, as a parent, I thought of my own kids who were in San Diego schools at the time, and news of yet another shooting made me fearful for them.

The third was that, as a member of the news media, I knew that the coverage had the potential for sensationalizing, demonizing and creating a media circus. Stories like this are so senseless and tragic that I approach them with a certain amount of dread.

Still, I thought it was important that I cover it because I thought perhaps I could provide understanding for something that seemed so unexplainable and painful.

I got to the school, where workers from several emergency vehicles were still sorting things out. Hundreds of students milled around, waiting for parents whose primal instincts had been triggered. Two people had been killed and 13 were wounded in the shooting before the student with the gun was stopped. I approached two girls, identified myself as a reporter and asked if I could ask them a few questions.

One knew the shooter well. They both had seen the bodies in the hallway. It was a terrifying sight for them, yet, through their tears, they wanted to talk about it.

As I wrote down their comments in my notebook, a small group of reporters gathered. Television cameras zoomed in. Other reporters asked questions.

It didn’t get out of control, but it was pretty intense.

While this was going on, I felt a hand on my shoulder. Usually when that happens to me in a crowd of journalists, it is a photographer asking me to move to one side or another for a better picture. Without turning around, I leaned a little to my left to accommodate what I presumed to be a colleague.

The hand remained.

So I moved a little to the right. Still no change. It didn’t put pressure on me. It wasn’t trying to get me to move. It just stayed there, and I let it remain while I did my work.

When I was done talking to the girls, I thanked them, and the other reporters moved on. I turned around to see who was behind me. It was my neighbor, from another part of the city, whose kids are in school with my kids. He works with Young Life and had come to the school to help with ministry after the attack. But he saw me, and decided to come along on my task and pray for me as I talked to witnesses of the shooting.

I saw his actions as God saying, “I got here before you. I am in the middle of this whole, terrible situation. I am here for the victims, the families, the shooter, the emergency workers, and the reporters. Even in the senseless events, where there seems to be nothing good, I am here.”

The activity of God was present—and thorough—expressed with a hand on a shoulder.

Eugene Peterson said, “Long before I arrive on the scene, the Spirit is at work. I must fit into what is going on.”

Jesus drives home this point with the story he tells about a judge who had little regard for God or people. In his city was a widow who kept coming to the judge, saying, “Grant me justice against my opponent.” He refused at first, but was worn down by the woman, so he finally granted her justice. It’s a story about how we are constantly confronted by grace—grace that pursues, invades, initiates. We are the judge in this story, and grace continuously approaches us, like the insistent woman, demanding that we do it justice by seeing it. It is grace that both pursues and precedes, and it bends us toward God.

When we’re paying attention, we see that grace is breaking into our everyday moments—even the terrible ones—making them different, making them sacred,

When we’re paying attention, we see that grace is breaking into our everyday moments—even the terrible ones—making them different, making them sacred, drawing us into the presence of God.

drawing us into the presence of God.

That hand on my shoulder wasn’t anyone saying, “You’re in my way.” It was God saying, “I am *on* your way. See me everywhere.”

Let’s do grace justice.



Dean Nelson directs the journalism program at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego. His book about seeing God in everyday life is “God Hides in Plain Sight: How to See the Sacred in a Chaotic World.”



Young girl uses brain tumor experience to bring comfort to others

by LORI ARNOLD

You won't find words like resection, anesthesiologist, magnetoencephalography and pilocytic astrocytoma on a second-grade spelling test, yet they quickly became part of young Alyssa McElfresh's vocabulary after doctors discovered a brain tumor in her left temporal lobe.

"I was scared and we questioned Jesus and we were mad at Him but through my journey we found out that He gave me this tumor to share my testimony."

Alyssa, who turns 13 this month, has become somewhat of an ambassador for children dealing with pediatric brain tumors. Four times a year she and her mother lovingly stuff goodies into "Blessings Bags" that they deliver to children in the pediatrics unit at Naval Medical Center San Diego. As she visits

the bedsides of her peers, she has plenty of experiences to share.

• • •

Alyssa was just 7 when her parents, Ryan and Sandra McElfresh, took her to the eye doctor for a routine eye exam in 2008. After discovering that Alyssa's vision was severely impaired in her right eye, the doctor ordered an MRI.

"That's when they found out I had a brain tumor," Alyssa said with the clinical certainty of someone who should be much too young to know about such matters.

The tumor was diagnosed as pilocytic astrocytoma, a grade one plum-size benign mass on the left side of her brain. According to the American Brain Tumor

Association, astrocytomas are tumors that "arise from astrocytes—star-shaped cells that make up the 'glue-like' or supportive tissue of the brain." Tumors in the grade that Alyssa has are generally slow-growing and typically do not spread.

"I wasn't really sure what it was," she said. "I freaked out about it, but then my mom and dad told me—and this is how I understood what a tumor was—it's extra tissue in your brain that you don't need."

The tumor, which Alyssa named "Olivia," was situated in a difficult spot and her neurologist determined that surgery would likely compromise her motor skills.

"Her sight fibers, the fibers for vital function, were laying right on top of the tumor," Sandra said. "That is one of the

reasons why the prognosis was that she was not going to see or that she wouldn't have her memory or would have gait issues."

Because of the dangers, doctors decided to wait on surgery, opting instead to monitoring the tumor's growth.

"He didn't want me to have surgery until it grew or I had seizures because he wanted to preserve my quality of life," Alyssa offered matter-of-factly.

So a four-year waiting game, dotted with doctor's appointments and endless tests, ensued. In the meantime, Alyssa's parents tried to maintain as much normalcy as possible. Alyssa, a student at Santee's Pride Academy, enrolled in dance and Girl Scouts, while her older sister, Taylor, learned how to drive. And when their dad, a chief assigned to the Navy's antisubmarine warfare division, was deployed to Iraq, Sandra assumed dual roles at home.

By fall 2012, however, the tumor forced the doctor's hand and Alyssa's first surgery was scheduled for that October. He prepared the family for the likelihood that she would have significant deficits impacting her speech and mobility, and perhaps causing even more damage to her sight than her already blind right eye.

"I was nervous of course, because it was my first surgery," Alyssa said.

Some of her jitters were eased by a brown bear, gifted to her with its own hospital gown by a representative from the Brain Tumor Society.

"I've had her ever since I was diagnosed," Alyssa said. "I named her Faith. Ever since then I always sleep with her. I take her to all of my surgeries, all of my MRIs."

Also helping her was the pre-op medications that made her "loopy."

During the surgery, her doctor left remnants of the tumor around her vital



PHOTO BY NENA STERNER

Alyssa McElfresh relaxes in the grass during a family photo shoot earlier this year. The pictures were taken prior to her last surgery to remove a benign brain tumor.

fibers intact in an effort to lessen post-op deficits.

"After my surgery I wasn't supposed to be talking, walking or seeing and I'm doing all of that," she said.

Sandra said that after reviewing a post-operative MRI the neurosurgeon, a practicing Christian, said Alyssa's recovery was beyond what he could have hoped for her.

"So basically what you are telling me is that it's a miracle that she's speaking and that she's seeing and that she can move her toes or whatever," she told the doctor in response.

But by late last year, the tumor had grown back even deeper, prompting doctors to schedule another surgery this past January. During Alyssa's pre-op appointment, however, doctors found a surprise.

"In three weeks the tumor shrunk and moved closer to the surface," Alyssa said. "Brain tumors don't do that, so we knew that God did that."

Unlike the first surgery, in this one the doctors were able to remove all of the tumor. And yet, only a few months later, they were stunned to find another growth in the same location. Alyssa underwent her third surgery in June.

"My doctor found out that there is a group of cells up above where he takes out my tumor and every single time he took out a tumor one would drop and

start growing; so this time he took out my whole left temporal lobe," she said,

Doctors are confident that with the cell cluster and temporal lobe removed, the tumor will not return this time. On the slight chance it does, radiation will be the treatment plan.

"If it comes back we would see symptoms right away, like slurred speech or blindness or trouble walking," her mom said.

"Each surgery, of course, he's (the doctor) going to tell us the worst-case scenario of what the prognosis would be, but we always had that faith and that trust that she was going to come out just as whole as she was when she went in. He agrees it's a God thing, that it's nothing that he did. God used his hands and God guided him, but it's all a God thing. She shouldn't be walking, talking. She should be in a wheelchair and she's not. It's just a blessing."

Remarkably, Alyssa has had minimal effects with the removal of the temporal lobe. She continues to have recall issues, which are expected to ease over time. She giggles when describing her difficulty with certain words, mixing up Michigan and missionaries, and pretzel and bell pepper.

It is unlikely, though, that she will ever regain sight in her right eye.

"It doesn't really bother me," Alyssa said. "With both of my eyes open I can



PHOTO BY AMY CARABAJAL

A favorite hobby of Alyssa McElfresh, right, is performing with her elite dance troupe, which helps her to keep her mind off of her health.

see perfectly fine.”

Although in the clear for now, Alyssa and her mom still make trips back to the hospital every three months for testing and MRIs.

They don’t enter the hospital empty-handed.

• • •

During her surgical stays at Naval Medical Center Alyssa would often play hangman with her parents, fill in her coloring books or draw on blank paper she brought to keep busy. Her iPod joined Faith the bear as a welcome companion. But as she walked the halls of the pediatric ward Alyssa observed that many of her ailing peers were bored.

“When I was in the hospital we noticed that there were kids that didn’t have anything to do,” Alyssa said.

She shared her discovery with her mom, who offered up a solution she saw on the Internet: toiletry bags with goodies for the homeless. They modified the idea for the needs of young patients.

“My mom and I thought to call it Blessing Bags,” she said. “So we had people donate stuff like crayons, coloring books and stuffed animals.”

As she distributes the bags, she visits with each patient, hoping that her gift

and story—including her prescription for fear—render comfort to tired and frightened children.

“I learned that I can’t be scared and do an activity at the same time, so that’s why I pray,” she said. “So when I pray to Jesus and talk to Him everything is better and I’m not scared anymore. When I pray to Him my worry is gone because I can’t pray to Him and be worried at the same time.”

Giving back has been a critical part of the healing process.

“It’s been a journey and we learned a lot and Alyssa is able to share that with other kids her age,” Sandra said.

In addition to her Blessing Bag ministry, Alyssa has formed Flip Flops and Polka Dots, her own fundraising team for



Alyssa sits by some Blessing Bags she prepared for children at Naval Medical Center San Diego, where she was being treated for a brain tumor.

the annual National Brain Tumor Society Walk. Supported by dozens of friends and family members who walk with her, Alyssa has raised about \$12,000 in four walks.

“It’s fun walking with my friends,” she said. “I go up and speak and share my testimony.”

Several weeks ago she was also one of the stars of the day for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation Ride for Kids. Alyssa and several other pediatric patients enjoyed an outing that included a one- to two-hour escorted motorcycle ride.

Fully recovered and able to do any non-contact sport or activity, Alyssa also remains busy by volunteering at her church’s Parents Night Out evenings as well as with the junior high worship team. Hoping to become a kindergarten teacher, she also helps out in the nursery.

“I like working with kids,” she said. “At my church I work with the toddlers and I like to babysit.”

Pastor Phil Herrington of Pathways Community Church said that over the years he’s frequently observed people going through major crises. He marvels at Alyssa.

“The ones who weather their storm best are those who keep their focus on God and others,” he said. “Alyssa has amazingly found purpose in her painful experience. She and her family have transformed a recurring brain tumor into a ministry to others. They offer comfort and hope with the comfort they have received from God and His people.”

At home she enjoys baking with her mom and cooking with Dad. Her dream is to win a contestant slot on the Food Network’s “Rachael vs. Guy: Kids Cook-Off.”

• • •

Food is definitely on her mind as her



Alyssa McElfresh and several of her peers were escorted for the Pediatric Brain Tumor Foundation Ride for Kids, held in September.

“There’s been times that we questioned, like when she was first diagnosed. Why Alyssa? And then there’s always that question why was she spared... when others aren’t.”

Those and other questions are on her list when she finally sees Jesus in heaven.

“But it’s not about that now,” she said. :It’s about how we can help others, bring comfort and be the hands and feet to others through her journey.”

Alyssa agrees.

“I feel like I got closer to Jesus,” she said. “Lots of people have told me that I have inspired them.” ■

family anticipates this year’s Thanksgiving feast, the most hopeful in recent years. And although she can’t wait to dig into the pumpkin and apple pies, she’s also cognizant of the much deeper meaning of the holiday.

“I’m thankful for my family and I’m thankful for Jesus and I’m thankful for my friends, my teachers, and I’m thankful for meeting other kids with brain tumors, too, so I didn’t feel alone,” she said, offering additional thanks for her doctors, having a roof over head and for the military who keeps her safe. “And being able to eat food and serving for Jesus. We do different activities to serve Him. It’s fun serving Him.”

Sandra acknowledges that Thanksgiving has taken on a new significance in the wake of her daughter’s medical challenges.

“We’re just so thankful that’s she’s here, because we didn’t expect her to be, and we are thankful that God gave her to us to be her parents and to walk this journey with her,” she said, her voice cracking from the reality of pain and hope. “We’re just blessed because so many parents aren’t.”

Milestone timeline for Alyssa McElfresh

Nov. 2008 - Routine eye exam reveals severe impairment in right eye

Dec. 2008 – MRI

Dec. 12, 2008 - Diagnosed with a brain tumor in left temporal lobe. Alyssa will be monitored through MRI every few months for brain tumor growth. Because Alyssa’s tumor is located in an area contributing to a poor prognosis, her family decides to monitor and not do surgery until it begins to grow

Oct. 1, 2012 - First brain surgery to remove tumor after previous MRI showed new growth

Nov. 19, 2012 - Alyssa celebrates her birthday by somersaulting, cartwheeling, running, jumping, skateboard riding and wall climbing after her neurologist released her to resume normal activity

Dec. 14, 2012 – First Blessing Bag delivery

April 27-29, 2013 - Alyssa takes Make-A-Wish trip to meet Christian singer Kari Jobe

Dec. 12, 2013 – Is diagnosed with second brain tumor—five years to the day from the first

Jan. 13, 2014 - Second brain surgery

Feb. 13, 2014 - Alyssa is cleared to resume normal activity

April 10, 2014 - Alyssa is diagnosed with her third brain tumor

June 23, 2014 – Third brain surgery, a left temporal lobectomy

July 24, 2014 - Alyssa is cleared to resume normal activity. She celebrates with a cartwheel in her doctor’s office but realizes it may be too soon and stops to avoid a headache

Sept. 9, 2014 - Alyssa’s doctor calls with post-op MRI results. There is no evidence of disease. Next MRI in six months

Radically redeemed

Once abused and broken, Tony Pallotto now rescues teens in trouble

by LORI ARNOLD

Tony Pallotto knew that his father *hated* it when they were late for something. Time mattered, even when he was plastered on a barstool.

“I once picked him up four minutes late at a bar,” Pallotto said. “When I disagreed with his (correct) assertion that I was late, he balled up his fist and backhanded me in the chest. It felt like my chest had caved in. As I regained my breath, I protested again that I had been on time. *Whack!* He nailed me again. This time, I thought I felt bones cracking and loosening. I bailed out of the car at a stop sign, screamed profanity at him, and walked home.”

He stayed out of sight until he knew his father was fast asleep. That’s what you do when violence hobbles a household.

“Another time, my brother came home late,” Pallotto, now 65, said. “I was in the bedroom. I heard the screen door in the kitchen creak open, then I heard *smack!*”

He heard a verbal tirade unleashed on his sibling.

“A minute later, my brother emerged from the bathroom with a white towel stained red,” he said. “His nose was bleeding like crazy and turned to one side. Some time later, my dad popped him again and turned his nose back the other way. He was a monster.”

Life in the Pallotto home wasn’t always a combat zone.

“Mom was nurturing in those days,” the Oceanside resident said. “She’d bathe me and my older brother, wrap us in warm towels, and put us to bed in warm, cozy pajamas. She’d cuddle us. Dad was much more composed in those days. Everything felt safe and normal in those early years.”

About the time Pallotto hit adolescence his father lost his job and “dived into a bottle. My mother dived in, too. Dad’s violence against the family became horrific.”

He knew no limits, often bruising and

disfiguring his mother. Police officers weren’t immune from his rage.

“He was a vile, wicked man, although he did manage to teach me a few good things,” said Pallotto, an Indiana native who was raised in Connecticut. “But life in those days was tense and often frightening.”

Like father, like son

As kids are apt to do, Pallotto followed his father’s footsteps, adding pot and LSD to his repertoire.

“The one time I used heroin, I flew into a rage and tried to beat to death the guy keeping company with my estranged girlfriend (now his wife, Maryann),” Pallotto said. “God stopped that barrage in a miraculous way. Years later, that same guy, named Dave, showed up in an unlikely way and bestowed upon me the greatest example of Christ-like forgiveness I’ve ever known. He also told me about the Lord and His forgiveness. He gets the credit for leading me to salvation through Christ. It’s an amazing story.”

Pallotto’s story is now chronicled in “Sidetracked: A Story of Family Wreckage and Radical Redemption,” written by Brian Lamay. The book is available on Amazon.

“After I accepted Christ, I walked with Jesus for several years, but an absence of fellowship and too much corporate prosperity set the stage for a monumental retreat from Christ. I returned to drinking, drugs and other forms of debauchery.”

He found his way back during a three-day anger-infested recovery from a weekend cocaine binge. After rallying from a half-dead state, Pallotto tore apart his bedroom while threatening to

Tony Pallotto’s tattoo juxtaposes right and wrong paths in life. The inscription bears names of his two brothers and one of his three sons, along with the dates they died. Their deaths stemmed from intravenous heroin usage.

kill anyone who came near him.

“I squandered the last shred of Christian dignity I had by uttering the Lord’s name in vain,” Pallotto said, adding that God “even used the profaning of His holy name for His glory. The realization that I’d let that slip away brought a tidal wave of conviction like I’d never known. It brought me to the end of myself.

“God brought me back to repentance by clearly revealing to me what a despicable, ungodly mess I had become. I was a substance-abusing, foul-mouthed, mean-spirited louse.”

Months later he lost his high-paying advertising job.

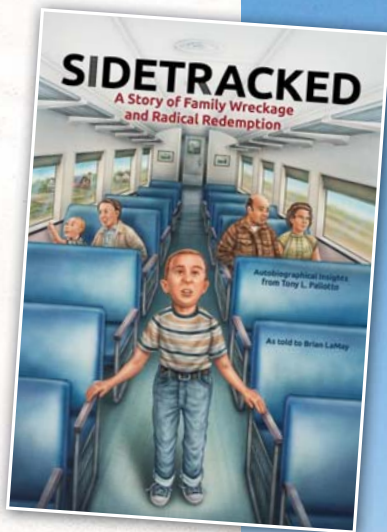
“God took everything away—my job, my house—but He gave me a ministry,” he said.

More loss

From the ruin, Pallotto launched Teen Adolescent Placement Services, a full-time ministry that offers a hotline, consultation, referrals, group home placement, and transport of teens who are troubled or a danger to themselves or others.

Since its origins in 1995, TAPS has helped nearly 20,000 families, placing





“Sidetracked: A Story of Family Wreckage and Radical Redemption,” tells the dramatic life story of Tony Pallatto.

more than 3,000 youth and transporting more than 1,300 to various programs, including ones in Northern California and Missouri.

Despite the ministry’s success, Pallatto could not save his own son, who died from a heroin overdose in 2001. Mark, the middle of three boys, fought addiction much of his life, though he kicked it for a time through Victory Outreach. He was running a successful street ministry in San Antonio when he relapsed after a break-up.

“We learned the sweetness of deep, personal fellowship with the Lord in the midst of our profound suffering,” he said. “Had it not been for Mark’s death—which we deeply, agonizingly regret nonetheless—we probably wouldn’t be nearly as close to the Lord as we are now.”

Pallotto has also lost two brothers to heroin, one through AIDS contracted from a dirty needle.

“I should have been dead many times over,” he said. “I’ve had enough car wrecks and close calls to be long gone, but God did not let me go over the edge. He tweaked events enough to keep me alive and breathing. I don’t know why, but He did. It’s not because I deserved it or because He needed me; He just did it.” ■

Learn more at www.taps14.org.

Tony Pallatto has spent the last 20 years trying to divert teens from heading “the wrong way” in life. He says his Oceanside-based ministry, TAPS, has helped nearly 20,000 families during that time. He published a book about his life this past summer. Tony says God, in keeping with Romans 8:28, has engineered good outcomes from bad events in his life.



PHOTO BY BRIAN LAMAY



Responding to Ebola

*How we
can help*



Samaritan's Purse workers bring a stretcher into an Ebola isolation center in Liberia. Since July, the organization has been managing the center located in Foya near the border with Guinea. The organization's team of medical doctors and highly trained nurses is providing direct clinical care to patients infected with the virus.

Responding to Ebola

Christian ministries seek funding to continue the fight against dreaded disease

by LORI ARNOLD

Even before Americans first became aware of the international Ebola threat festering in Western Africa, Christian relief groups were quietly working behind the scenes, aiding people and villages ravaged by the deadly disease.

It was no wonder, then, that the first two patients to enter the United States for treatment were missionaries affiliated with two of these groups, Samaritan's Purse and SIM. Dr. Kent Brantly, who was treating patients for Samaritan's Purse when he was afflicted, and Nancy Writebol, a SIM worker who was serving with her husband, have since recovered.

But as the international numbers escalate—and the United States records its first fatality—relief groups are ramping up their response. Those seeking donations include:

Samaritan's Purse

Samaritan's Purse, which has well-established programs in the region, is in the process of launching a new community care initiative in high-transmission areas of Liberia, one of the hardest-hit countries.

The project involves training Liberians to run 10-bed facilities that will provide basic supportive care, in an effort to reduce transmission rates. The 15 proposed centers will be built and managed by Samaritan's Purse. In addition to providing hygienic care, as many as 3,000 care kits containing protective clothing, hydration items, disinfectant and other materials will be distributed.

The new approach supplements ongoing education programs that include a church-based project that has reached

more than 450,000 people in the distribution of nearly 100 tons of supplies and the allocation of 50,000 hygiene kits with gloves, soap, buckets, and disinfectants for hand-washing and treating drinking water.



World Vision medical supplies await loading on a Boeing 747-400 destined for West Africa.

World Vision

More than 200 pallets of medical relief supplies were flown to Sierra Leone in September by World Vision, just days before the government shut down the airport for a three-day quarantine in an effort to contain the spread of Ebola.

The shipment included four million pairs of latex gloves, enough to meet the needs of Sierra Leone for five months. In addition to the gloves, the personal protective equipment kits included aprons, goggles, face shields, masks, covers, medical frocks, trousers and scrubs. The shipment also included 8,000 gallons of disinfectant.

World Vision, which has been in the region for nearly 20 years, has 272 staff members assigned to Sierra Leone.

Operation Blessing International

Clorine, one of the few disinfectants

that's proven beneficial in containing Ebola, has been in short supply, so Operation Blessing recently shipped five chlorine generators into Liberia while also providing ongoing training on how to use the equipment. The generators can produce 550 gallons of chlorine a day.

Containers shipped by the ministry also contained hospital linens and other medical supplies.

SIM

Soudan Interior Mission has more than 1,600 active missionaries serving in more than 60 countries, including Liberia, where Writebol was working when she contracted Ebola.

Although not a relief organization, SIM, founded in 1893, has been involved in prayer support, hosting a weeklong prayer effort for the eradication of Ebola that ended Oct. 5.

"Our desire is for prayers to be raised continually on behalf of those infected and affected by the Ebola virus, for the sick and dying, for the courageous health workers, for grieving families, for pastors trying to serve their churches and communities, for government officials and decision makers who formulate policies and responses, for protection for those working in educating communities, and for all those waking up each day to the devastation of Ebola," the ministry website said. ■

LEARN MORE ONLINE

Samaritan's Purse: www.samaritanspurse.org
World Vision: www.worldvision.org
Operation Blessing: www.ob.org
SIM: www.sim.org



Dr. Kent Brantly, prior to testing positive for the Ebola virus, works in the Ebola isolation center managed by Samaritan's Purse at EWLA Hospital in Monrovia, Liberia.

Soul for soles

Local tween collects 2,000 pairs of shoes for charity

by LORI ARNOLD

In many ways Tiffany Barbera is like any average Southern Californian middle-schooler. She likes skateboarding and dreams of playing volleyball at Stanford University. She hopes to parlay her love of animals into a career as a zoologist. But as most of her peers spent their summers at the beach or engaging in other recreational activities, the Rancho Bernardo 11-year-old was focused on saving soles—all 2,000 pairs.

“One summer we decided to do something different, something good for the community,” said Tiffany, a student at Oak Valley Middle School.

So her family researched a variety of non-profit charities they could support.

“Soles4Souls seemed so simple, but so necessary,” Tiffany said. “Made me sad that kids don’t have shoes and can’t even walk to school.”

Founded in 2006, the global anti-poverty group provides shoes and clothing to impoverished communities worldwide.

“I just think about the people that really need these shoes and then I think about how spoiled we are in this community and I really wanted to give back.”

So last year, she collected 1,000 pairs of shoes, which her father, Michael, drove up to a collection center in Los Angeles. This year she doubled her goal.

“I wanted to be able to help more people,” she said.

Fully expecting to work twice as hard this summer in order to reach her goal, Tiffany was surprised to find help from corporate America.

“The best story that came out of this project is Stride Rite coming to my house and donating \$1,000 to me so I can go to donate that money to a special charity,” she said. “They arranged for me to get all 2,000 pairs to Soles4Souls. Stride

Rite helped me reach even more people. Now more people want to be involved.”

FedEx also got on board, shipping all of the shoes to Los Angeles.

Local publicity also fueled donations.

“Since there’s so many people supporting me I never understood the magnitude of what I was doing ’til I saw myself in a magazine,” she said. “That’s when I noticed that I was doing something special and people liked it.

“By putting just a little bit more effort than usual you can get so, so much more in return. I couldn’t believe how many shoes I got. Involve as many people as you know. Everyone wants to help, they just don’t know how.”

Tiffany said she believes it’s important that young people understand how difficult many children have it in developing countries.

“(I learned) how many people in the world that don’t have shoes, don’t have homes,” she said.

Even so, the preteen said she believes that individuals do have the ability to make lasting changes.

“It’s a great thing doing things for other people and it makes me feel special inside once you do it,” Tiffany said. “Even if you’re tired (and) want to play with your friends instead of doing your work. But at the end it’s all worth it. You can start a spark and make a difference.” ■



Tiffany Barbera stands in front of boxes packed with the 2,000 pairs of shoes she collected for Soles4Souls, a ministry that provides footwear for underprivileged children around the globe.

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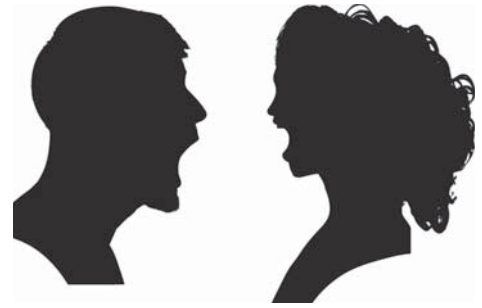
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Are you parenting with empathy or anxiety?



How parents unwittingly contribute to a child's emotional stress

by DONALD W. WELCH

Can you fix our daughter Lily?" The voice on the other end of the phone call was full of anxiety. "Her mom and I can't get a word out of her. She always looks depressed and angry to me. Can you help us?"

I can't count how many times I have heard similar desperation from parents worried for their child's wellbeing.

It turned out that Lily's parents had cause for concern. She was worse off than they knew, in circumstances not uncommon to today's adolescents. Once I got a full picture of the situation, I saw why Lily was failing classes, isolated, lacking in self-esteem, and suicidal.

I also discerned something crucial to the picture: Lily's suicidal feelings were being fueled by her parents' anxiety-based relationship. Their difficulties and how they related to each other impacted Lily's anxiety and depression. The pervasive layer of social media only added to the crisis.

Lily's parents were so at odds with each other, focused on their own (narcissistic) individual worlds, where for at least three critical years Lily was drowning in a pool of anxiety. Like an apple deprived of its resource-rich mother-tree, because Lily wasn't experiencing the positive parental nutrients she needed, over time her core self-esteem just shriveled.

Even if your marriage — or your relationship with your child's other biological parent — is civil and respectful, any amount of anxiety between two biological parents impacts the child's anxiety.

Defining anxiety

Although there are several anxiety disorders, typically all have a combination of anxiety and excessive fear.

According to the *Diagnostic and Sta-*

tistical Manual of Mental Disorders DSM-5, "Fear is the emotional response to real or perceived imminent threat, whereas anxiety is anticipation of future threat."

The combination of fear and anxiety experienced over time often leads to depression. One predominate depressive feeling is of a foreboding sense of being helpless and powerless. The person thinks *I can't do anything about it*. Survival itself seems in question. He or she needs to "self-soothe" these impulses. Often the only choice appears to be to self-medicate.

This is one of the reasons why so many adolescents are susceptible to media and drug use — and why they desperately need skills for decreasing fear, anxiety, and depression. One of those skills is known as the ability to self-soothe.

The famed research supporting this "mimicking" behavior originated with Dr. Bandura and his famous *Bobo Doll* experiment. A child is sitting in a room comfortably playing until — without warning — an adult entering the room violently attacks a stand-up blow-up doll.

Immediately following the adult's cruel outburst and exit from the room, and with no prompting, the child predictably stands up and acts out the adult's behavior by aggressively hitting and shouting out angry outbursts toward the blow-up doll. Even though adults are prone to act out in the same way as the child mimicking, children naturally look to adults for how they should behave. Media often produces similar behaviors, modeling aggressive and morally unfit materials imitated by children.

Researcher Chris Boyatzis and his associates discovered children viewing the *Power Rangers*, a somewhat violent 1990s children's twenty-year series live-action

television program, acted out with seven times more aggressive behaviors during a two-minute interval compared to those not viewing the show.

The American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry has said it well: "Sometimes, watching a single violent program can increase aggressiveness. Children who view shows in which violence is very realistic, frequently repeated, or unpunished, are more likely to imitate what they see."

Bible guidelines for parenting with empathy

So, clearly, emotion around children really does impact them. The Bible revealed this truth thousands of years before current research. "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

Ultimately, God made children to early on *catch things more than they are taught things*. And, since a child is not naturally self-assured — but wired to seek assistance from his or her parent — the child is automatically wired to absorb the parent's emotion.

Generally speaking, those of us in the mental health field working with ADHD symptoms carefully assess the parent's emotional impact on their child. It's important to determine if and how the adult's fears and uncertainties become the adolescent's.

Relationship specialists generally agree that children of all ages tend to emulate everything around them. If there's a highly anxious parent, typically there will be at some level an anxious child. If the media influences are saturated with anxiety, likely the child will at some level take on that anxiety. Even depression finds its way from parent to child and media to child.

Both anxiety and depression weave their way through family and medical histories. That's why if you are seeking mental health care for depression at your medical doctor's office the intake form will ask, "Is there any depression in your family?" Decades of research reveals how a person is much more likely to experience depression when one or both of his parents experienced diagnosable depression. Regrettably, emotion is passed on generationally.

If anxiety is at the center of an adolescent's parents' interactions, as we saw in the case of Lily, the child often has very little empathy for one's self. If you can't love yourself, it's very difficult to love others, isn't it?

At the time of Lily's therapy, she was self-effacing and overwhelmed with apprehension about the future. The bottom line: Lily had very little sense of a self-identity.

As we continued in therapy, it became apparent that Lily's depression and anxiety were due in great part to her parent's anxiety. Although media exposure was a secondary symptom and not the primary reason, the combination of her parents' ruptured relationship and media influ-

ences was the negative recipe — a situation I find all too often for many of today's teenagers and their families.

Lily's stress-filled-home environment became Lily's emotional stress; she had no one to turn to to fix her parents' anxiety; therefore, media was her form of self-medication.

It is important to consider that healthy people *self-regulate* rather than *self-medicate*. Unhealthy people self-medicate rather than self-regulate. To self-regulate is learning how to healthily manage emotions rather allowing them to manage you.

Self-medicating includes using means to self-regulate that don't produce positive effects. Think of the person hooked on soap operas attempting to supplement their deficient emotional needs, or someone constantly checking Facebook or Instagram for "likes," or a person smoking pot or using porn to ease the anxiety.

Lily's parents had no clue whatsoever that their perpetually-eroding marriage relationship was disabling their adolescent. Thankfully, though, following a few months of therapy, the disconnected couple and Lily entered my office, and

the couple said, "We are committed to reconciling our marriage rather than ending our marriage."

At that moment, I wished every couple in America who are contemplating divorce could have been a fly on the wall observing Lily. She was beaming. Not only that. Her entire appearance was so remarkably altered that I had to take a second glance to convince myself this was the same girl.

Lily's hair, previously dangling over her forehead proclaiming *I'm not here and I don't like you*, is now pulled back, revealing a newly-found smile, as if to say, *I have a brand new outlook on life!* It was amazing to see this transformed person named Lily! ■



Rev. Donald W. Welch, Ph.D., LMFT is founder and president of Enriching Relationships, Inc., a nonprofit research and professional counseling center. He is also owner

and director of Family Counseling Services, Inc. He currently serves as Skyline Church's counseling pastor. Learn more at www.enrichingrelationships.org and www.fcssandiego.com.

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Rogue film script would mean exodus for 'Exodus'

The success of the epic motion picture "Exodus: Gods and Kings," set for pre-Christmas release on Dec. 12 and starring Christian Bale, will largely depend on how much producers stick to the biblical storyline, a new survey says.

The survey was conducted by American Insights, a research firm that found that 80 percent of the Christians it surveyed would see the movie if it accurately portrays the biblical account. The number drops to just 31 percent if producers tinker with the plot line.

The survey was conducted in conjunction with the research group's partner, Faith Driven Consumer, an online community that promotes the unique needs of Christians to the broader marketplace, including entertainment and retail outlets.



Christian audiences are eagerly anticipating the Dec. 12 release of "Exodus: Gods and Kings," but a new survey finds they will stay home if the storyline diverts too much from the Bible.

"When Hollywood's content resonates, faith driven consumers go out

of their way to spend their hard-earned dollars and time to show support," said Chris Stone, certified brand strategist and founder of Faith Driven Consumer.

While 2014 has been deemed "Year of the Bible" because of a series of successful faith-based films, including "Heaven is For Real," "God's Not Dead" and "Son of God," Christian audiences balked at "Noah," which took liberties with the script.

"We regularly meet with Hollywood industry leaders, encouraging them to create more and better content that resonates with faith-driven consumers specifically and the overall Christian market in general," Stone added. "When products don't resonate—as we saw earlier this year with the storm over 'Noah'—they stay home."

Stone said the findings also show that the producer, Ridley Scott, could wind up with a megahit if he also engages the faith community, particularly pastors.

"If done correctly, 'Exodus' could earn true blockbuster status and beat the box office record set by 'The Passion of the Christ' 10 years ago. If done poorly, it will be another massive missed opportunity."

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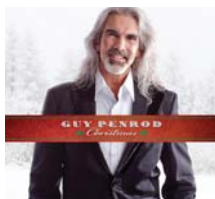
Friends join Guy Penrod for debut Christmas recording

Grammy and Dove Award-winning artist Guy Penrod celebrates the season this year with his debut holiday recording, *Christmas*.

Christmas captures 15 seasonal favorites including “Tennessee Christmas,” featuring Amy Grant and Vince Gill, as well as “Twelve Days of Christmas,” which is a family affair featuring vocals from his eight children and his wife, Angie.

The album showcases Penrod’s powerful country-tinged vocals with heartfelt melodies that include many all-time favorite Christmas classics.

One of the most popular artists ever featured on the Gaither Homecoming Video Series, Penrod is well-known for his long gray locks and outlaw look. He spent 14 years as the lead singer of the Gaither Vocal Band before launching a successful solo ministry with combined career sales now in excess of four million units.



Mandisa remixes it with new album

Grammy Award-winner Mandisa has released her first full remix album, *Get Up: The Remixes*, which showcases some of her biggest hits, including “Overcomer,” “Stronger” and “Good Morning.” Mandisa has performed all three of those singles on ABC’s *Good Morning America*.



The upbeat remix release comes amid a busy year for the American Idol alum. In June, the vocalist was named Female Artist of the Year at the K-LOVE Fan Awards, held at the Grand Ole Opry House. During the award show, Mandisa performed “Overcomer,” which earned a Song of the Year nod at the fan-driven event. The title album also received a Grammy earlier this year for Best Contemporary Christian Music Album and

Best Contemporary Christian Music Song for writers David Garcia, Ben Glover & Christopher Stevens.

Alabama releases album of gospel favorites

The legendary country music group Alabama recently released an all-hymns album on the Gaither Music Group label.

Angels Among Us: Hymns and Gospel Favorites includes 12 popular songs ranging from “I Saw the Light” and “The Old Rugged Cross” to “What A Friend We Have In Jesus” and “I’ll Fly Away.”

Alabama, one of the most acclaimed country groups of all time, has sold more than 75 million albums and singles, achieved 43 No. 1 songs, received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame and was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.



10th album for Chris Tomlin

Prolific singer songwriter Chris Tomlin unveiled in his 10th studio album *Love Ran Red* in late October. The project features the pre-released singles “Waterfall,” and “Jesus Loves Me,” an original ballad bearing no resemblance to the popular childhood hymn originating in the 1800s.

The album was produced by Ed Cash, a longtime friend and collaborator who also penned some of the songs, as did Tomlin, Matt Redman, Jonah Myrin, Ben Glover, Jason Ingram, and Ben Fielding. A special Deluxe Edition will feature the full-length studio album along with four bonus tracks.

‘The Dream’ from Sanctus Real

Sanctus Real joins the list of Christian groups releasing fall albums with the Oct. 14 drop of *The Dream*, billed as a “direct reference to finding your dream and the band’s dream of making the album of their lives.” The project includes the singles “Lay It Down” and “Head in the Fight.”

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Christmas concert to benefit Rady's

ESCONDIDO — Carols by Candlelight will celebrate its 25th anniversary during shows on Dec. 12 and 13 at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

The show, a benefit for Rady Children's Hospital, will feature the music of America, Juice Newton, and locals Berkeley Hart Selis Twang, Mary James, Steve Vaus and Anna Vaus.

Carols by Candlelight was created in 1990 by Steve Vaus and Wayne Nelson, with the goal of making a life-changing difference in the lives of children. In its early days, the show was presented as a free concert at Horton Plaza, before moving to the Poway Center for the Performing Arts to accommodate audience growth. The show is now produced by the California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

Learn more at www.carolsbycandlelight.com or call (760) 839-4138.

Emmanuel Faith celebrates 75 years

ESCONDIDO — On Sunday, Oct. 12, Emmanuel Faith Community Church in Escondido celebrated its 75th year in style complete with fun family games, a pastor dunk tank, BBQ food from various themed decades, reunions, and much

reminiscing.

One week later the church's celebration culminated with two morning services under a big tent on its athletic field.

The church was founded in 1939 by the Rev. Earl Morgan, a Dallas Theological Seminary graduate who wanted to start a church independent of any specific denomination.

The church is currently pastored by Dennis Keating who succeeded Dr. Richard Strauss in 1993.

'Traditions of Christmas' returns

SAN DIEGO — The 21st annual Traditions of Christmas, produced by Christian Community Theater, will be presented 2 p.m. Dec. 19 and at 2 and 7 p.m. Dec. 20 to 23 at the Don Powell Theater at San Diego State University.

Billed as the biggest Christmas show in San Diego, the production has drawn more than 250,000 patrons since its inception. The variety show is a musical journey that includes some of the greatest Christmas songs and traditions from around the world, including Santa's Workshop with dancing elves, Raggedy Ann dolls, toy soldiers and magical toys, a Rockette-style tap dancing kickline, music sing-alongs and a Living Nativity.



Emmanuel Faith Community Church members had lots of fun during their 75th anniversary celebration.

The theater is located at 5500 Campanile Drive.

Learn more at www.cytsandiego.org or call (619) 588-0206.

Therapists to discuss debt, anxiety

LA MESA — "My Therapist 'Sez'..." a monthly community-oriented panel discussion featuring various mental health professionals from the region, will be held from 6:45 to 8 p.m. Dec. 3 at Skyline Church.

The topic will be "Addiction Intervention—Speaking Truth in Love." The program will be moderated by Dr. Don Welch, founder and president of the Center for Enriching Relationships and counseling pastor at Skyline.

The monthly sessions are held the first Wednesday of each month.

The church is located at 11330 Campo Road.

For information, call (619) 660-5000.

'Wonder of Creation' on display

SAN DIEGO — St. Mark's United Methodist Church continues its 2014 Digital Art Show "The Wonder of Creation" through Nov. 10.

The exhibit features any work that was made using a computer application to create or significantly modify the artist's work, including camera work and graphics.

The show is open to the general public from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturdays through Nov. 11.

For information, call (858) 273-1480.

Christmas Collective seeks vendors

SAN DIEGO — Flood Church will hold its annual Christmas concert, the Christmas Collective, on Dec. 7 at the San Diego Convention Center.

In addition to the concert, the church will host a "conscientious market" in which shoppers can search for alternative and purposeful gifts for Christmas. Vendors are still being sought.

Learn more at www.floodsandiego.com.

Walking for babies

LA MESA — The Steppin' Up with CAPS Walk, to benefit CAPS Pregnancy Services, will be held from 2 to 5 p.m. Nov. 16 at Lake Murray.

The park entrance is at 5540 Kiowa Drive. Special parking instructions can be found on the CAPS Walk website.

The center hopes to raise \$50,000 to help in its effort to assist its pregnant clients.

Learn more at www.capswalk.org or call (619) 337-8080.

Worship Nights in North Park

SAN DIEGO — Bethel Music presents its "Worship Nights: Let Heaven Come" concert at 7 p.m. Nov. 18 at North Park Theatre. The music will be augmented with a time of encouragement and prayer.

The concert is one of a series being presented in cities across the Southwestern United States, including Los Angeles, San



Musician William Matthews is one of the featured performers in "Worship Nights: Let Heaven Come" concert.

The San Diego concert will feature William Matthews, Amanda Cook, Hunter Thompson and Paul and Hannah McClure.

Concert tickets are \$22. Breakout session admission is \$49.

Learn more at www.bethelmusic.com/worshipnights or call (530) 351-7561.

Youth conference in Rancho Bernardo

RANCHO BERNARDO — The World Changers Alliance Conference 2014 will be held beginning at 6 p.m. Nov. 14 at

Francisco, Riverside, Fresno, Phoenix, Colorado Springs, Albuquerque and El Paso.

In addition to the concert, breakout sessions will be offered.

The Church at Rancho Bernardo. The conference continues at 9 a.m. Nov. 15.

The conference, targeting youth and young adults, will feature worship session, concerts and more than 20 interactive workshops.

Registrants will receive a free full-length live album featuring music from the conference.

The church is located at 11740 Bernardo Plaza Court.

For information, call (619) 379-0982.


Fall craft fair set

EL CAJON — The Salvation Army will hold a Fall Fest Craft Fair beginning at 9 a.m. Nov. 8.

In addition to arts and crafts, the event will offer unique gifts, greeting cards, silent auctions and a bake sale. The sale is a benefit for the Corps' women's ministry programs and service projects.

The corps is located at 1011 E. Main St.

For information, call (619) 440-4683.



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'Hallelujah!' at La Jolla church

LA JOLLA — La Jolla Presbyterian Church will present its Christmas Concert "Hallelujah!" at 4 and 7 p.m. Dec. 14.

The event, part of an ongoing concert series presented by the congregation's Worship and Arts Ministry, will showcase the greatest story ever told through traditional and contemporary carols and anthems. The music will be presented by the Chancel Choir and professional orchestra and concludes with the Christmas portion of Messiah and Handel's exultant "Hallelujah Chorus. The early performance will include the children's choirs.

Learn more at www.ljpres.org/concert-series.

Fundraising banquet for women's center

ESCONDIDO — Alternatives Women's Center will hold its free Giving Banquet from 6:30 to 9 p.m. Nov. 13 at the California Center for the Arts, Escondido.

Dr. Marc Newman, founder and president of Speaker for Life, a training firm dedicated to equipping pro-life advocates nationwide with public speaking skills, will be the speaker.

The crisis pregnancy center provides a medical environment that protects the right to life of the preborn.

The arts center is located at 340 N. Escondido Blvd.

For information, call (760) 741-9796.

Bazaar benefits Homefront SD

SAN MARCOS — Woodland Park Bible

Church will hold a Christmas Bazaar from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Nov. 22.

The event is a fundraiser for Homefront San Diego. Booths will include handmade crafts, children's activities and food. Jerry Langford, morning host for KSDW 88.9 FM radio, will participate.

The church is located at 1093 Rock Springs Road.

Holiday Market at First Pres

SAN DIEGO — First Presbyterian Church will hold its 6th annual Holiday Market, which brings together 30 local crafters and nonprofits.

The event runs from noon to 7 p.m. Nov. 14 and 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Nov. 15. Lunch, dinner, baked goods and fair trade products will also be available for sale. Profits go to individual vendors and the church's women's ministry outreach. Raffles will be held hourly.

The church is located at 320 Date St.

Learn more at www.fpcsd.org or call (619) 232-7513.

Celebrating 90 years

CARLSBAD — Carlsbad Community Church will celebrate its 90th anniversary at 9 a.m. Nov. 16. The event will include a continental breakfast.

The church began in May 1922 with



Homemade goodies, including jams, will be available at the annual Christmas Bazaar at Woodland Park Bible Church.

a Bible study and was chartered six months later as Carlsbad Union Church with 40 members.

The church is located at 3175 Harding St.

Learn more at www.3c.org or call (760) 729-2331.

'Beauty' on stage

PACIFIC BEACH — Christian Youth Theater will present the Disney classic "Beauty and the Beast" from Nov. 14 to Nov. 22 at Pacific Beach Middle School.

The family friendly musical offers romance and comedy in an all-child cast and support crew.

In addition to the Pacific Beach show, CYT is offering other shows throughout the county, including "The Addams Family" at the Maxine Theater at Valley Center High School; "Schoolhouse Rock Live" at Mater Dei High School in Chula Vista; "Willy Wonka" at Greenfield Middle School in El Cajon and "Alice in Wonderland" at the Star Theatre in Oceanside. All performance dates vary.

Learn more at www.cytssandiego.org.

Presentation Tea for honorees

RANCHO SANTA FE — The Salvation Army Women's Auxiliary will host its Presentation Tea for the 2015 Women of Dedication Honorees from 1 to 3 p.m. Nov. 6 at a private home in Rancho Santa Fe.

The names and accomplishments of the 2015 honorees will be announced at the event. The women will be officially honored during an April 7 luncheon at the Hilton San Diego on the bayfront. The 15 honorees are residents of La Jolla, Rancho Santa Fe Del Mar, Solana Beach, Coronado and San Diego.

For information, call (858) 461-4306.

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Signs of the times

Signs, signs, everywhere the signs. There are signs of the times, signs of the seasons and “signs and wonders.” Signs are increasing in number to the point where I ask myself if we can do anything on our own anymore.

Most signs are good ones, of course: STOP, GO and YIELD come to mind. Speed limits are necessary, too, though in some spots it seems they’re only “suggestions.” Many signs are essential to safety. NO LITTERING is excellent, too (though it should be common sense).

I wonder how people would function if we had fewer signs addressing everything in life. In some situations it’s hard to figure out what a person *can* do, since there are so many posted messages prohibiting things.

In recent years, San Diego added new beach bans to the mix: *No booze on the sand, no dogs, no playing of certain beach games, no smoking* and more. Multiple signs hang from lampposts, along with other plaques detailing specific municipal regulations, citations and other inside-City-Hall codes that only politicians can interpret.

With all the signs out there, I still sense that the politically correct crowd has much more work to do. There’s always something that may offend someone, so it’s a growing market. Where does it all stop?

Do this. don’t do that... hey, can’t you read the signs?!?!”

Maybe not. That could be why more signs display pictures, not words. Possibly for simplicity of message, but I am guessing it has more to do with literacy... or lack of it.

There’s also the issue of messages in multiple languages. I love America’s melting-pot blend of culture, but how soon before sign makers will delight in making sure every dialect is represented

where signs are posted, *ala* multi-lingual ballots that would make United Nations bureaucrats happy.

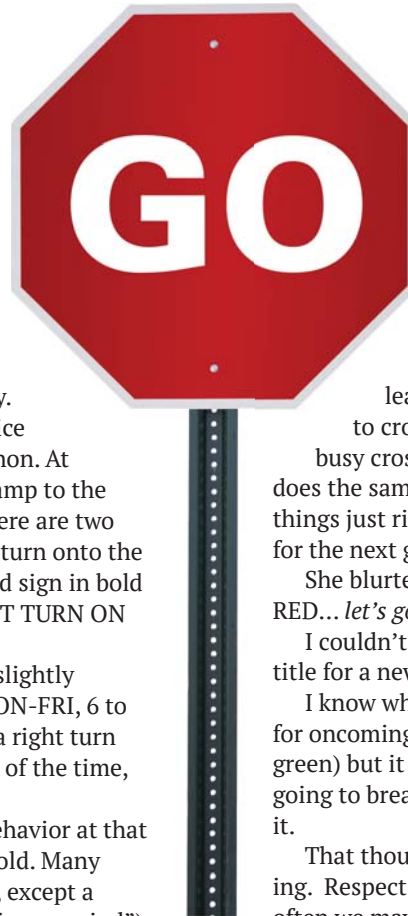
Every morning I notice a fascinating phenomenon. At my neighborhood on-ramp to the Interstate 8 freeway, there are two lanes that allow a right turn onto the ramp. The clearly posted sign in bold letters states: NO RIGHT TURN ON RED.

Under that sign is a slightly smaller sign noting “MON-FRI, 6 to 9AM.” In other words, a right turn on red light is fine *most* of the time, except those times.

Observing human behavior at that spot is a wonder to behold. Many people don’t stop at all, except a quick California stop (“in my mind”) before turning. Others sit waiting for the light to change while glaring piously at others who appear to be breaking the law (even though they’re not). Then there are those who must think the signs are as complicated as “War and Peace,” sitting through a couple of green lights in their battle to comprehend.

Caltrans complicates matters by adding more electronic freeway signs that were originally to be used for important information such as “Amber Alerts.” Lately, messages have flashed warnings about water use and drought conditions, fines for not doing this or that and travel updates. It’s especially funny when the lit-up signs admonish drivers for distracted driving while distracting them.

Some good news: Signs can be metaphors for life. Our own mental restrictions, along with rules imposed by others based on personal preference rather than truth or safety, can limit personal growth.



This point was brought home the other day when

Mrs. Larson and I were leaving church, about

to cross a major street at a

busy crosswalk. There everyone does the same thing, trying to time things just right to avoid a long wait for the next green light.

She blurted out, “Hey, the light’s RED... *let’s go!*”

I couldn’t stop laughing. Great title for a new book, I said.

I know what she meant (the light for oncoming traffic was red, ours green) but it sounded as if we were going to break the rules and go for it.

That thought was invigorating. Respect the law, yes. But too often we may mentally condition ourselves to accepting multiple restrictions beyond what is necessary for life. We’re so used to others telling us what can and can’t be done that we act powerless.

That can lead to misconstruing what the rules are, and complicating things.

Metaphorically, it just might be that a RED light in life doesn’t have to mean STOP. It could be there to create a thinking moment, leading to a YIELD or CAUTION, then a DETOUR into right choices ... leading to many new GREEN lights ahead.

The light’s RED... let’s go!



Mark Larson is a veteran Southern California radio/television personality and media consultant. His voice is heard on KPRZ 1210AM, and his weekday talk

show airs mornings 6-9 on KCBQ 1170AM. Learn more at www.marklarson.com.

KIMBERLY RUBY



Medicinal mushrooms blazing a path

As a little kid growing up in East San Diego, I remember heading out in the early morning hours to see what magical alien orbs sprang up overnight on our front lawn. It was my own quirky version of a year-round Easter egg hunt. They felt different than any other plant or shrub, foam-like and soft. The underside “gills” were perfectly formed, and the musty smell is imprinted in my memory bank.

My parents warned me about eating our visiting mushroom friends when they saw me carefully dissecting the poisonous harvest on our picnic table.

Many years later, I worked as a territory manager for the nation’s leading nutritional herb manufacturer, calling on natural food stores and educating the public on the benefits of “God’s Natural Pharmacy.”

Needless to say, I became very excited and curious when my company introduced medicinal mushrooms to the line. I pored over the literature and heard scientists speak on the many uses of mushrooms throughout history. Mushrooms in fact, have been used for centuries in numerous cultures as clothing, tools, food and medicinals.

I was both hooked and fascinated! “Mycology,” the scientific study of edible fungi, was truly making its mark through research and proven efficacy.

Several years down the road I remember meeting the owner of a mushroom production company at a four-day medical conference. I was coming down with something that was about to knock me out, standing on my feet for countless hours and interacting with hundreds of people. He gave me a small bottle of an almost-black liquid and explained if I took 10 drops in warm liquid several times a day, I might feel better. He was right. This welcome remedy totally knocked out the bug.

Working now as a nutritionist in a leading-edge pharmacy chain that also

supports health and longevity, we get to learn about some of the great new inroads surfacing in the field of functional medicine. Last year, I came across Dr. Paul Stamets, mycologist, founder, cultivator and producer of Host Defense Organic Mushrooms in Olympia, Washington.

This guy knows mushrooms!

I watched him give a class on TED online and I read as much as I could find about his passion to preserve and protect as many ancestral strains of mushrooms in the Pacific Northwest. For more than 30 years, Stamets has discovered several new species of mushrooms and pioneered countless techniques in the cultivation of edible mushrooms.

In his book “Mycomedicinals” Stamets describes and documents the health benefits of 17 different species of mushrooms and includes answers to frequently asked questions along with an extensive bibliography. His book, one of four he’s authored on mushrooms, also includes an extensive bibliography.

One of America’s top naturopaths, Dr. Mark Stengler, whose practice is based in Encinitas, is the author of 18 different books on natural medicine. In his book “The Health Benefits of Mushrooms,” he states, “There are over 700 species of mushrooms that can be eaten as nutritious foods. Medicinal mushrooms have been shown to restore the competency of the immune system and improve a variety of serious illnesses.”

Dr. Andrew Weil, a highly respected physician, speaker, TV guest and author, is also a big fan of mushrooms.

He shares a brief guide to his favorite varieties:

Shiitake—These flavorful and meaty mushrooms contain a substance called eritadenine, which encourages body tissue to absorb cholesterol and lower the amount circulating in the blood. Shiitakes

also have antiviral and anticancer effects

Cordyceps—A Chinese fungus, this species is used to support energy and stamina. They are also known for improving athletic performance by assisting in oxygen uptake and enhancing the body’s natural metabolic systems.

Maitake—This delicious mushroom has antiviral and blood sugar balancing enhancing effects. Rich in beta glucans, maitake is well known for promoting immune health.

Lion’s mane—A non-toxic, medicinal and culinary mushroom, lion’s mane is believed to improve mild cognitive impairment while supporting neurological function.

Reishi—Strictly a medicinal mushroom, reishi is shown to have significant anti-inflammatory effects, reduces allergic responsiveness and protects the liver.

Most mushrooms are sold in capsule or liquid form.

It’s right about now I have to say that these statements have not been evaluated by the FDA, and these products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

As you can see, mushrooms are amazing and can open up a whole new world of nutritional support and exploration!

Please let me know if you have any questions or comments by emailing me at kim@ucprx.com. May you serve and bless others in good health!



Kimberly Ruby, certified nutritionist at University Compounding Pharmacy, has been in the wellness industry for more than 20 years. She has been facilitating one of the

longest running weight management support groups in the nation, meeting weekly in the North County for 10 years. Her health segments have appeared on local news channels.

When sleep is not refreshing

The feeling of sleepiness when you are not in bed, and can't get there, is the meanest feeling in the world.

— C. S. Lewis

A friend of mine reported that her dreams were invading her reality. While waking up from a deep sleep she would see things in her room that were from her dreams. For example, while dreaming about Amish people, she woke up to find a woman with a bonnet standing in her room. Within a few seconds the bonneted lady disappeared and my friend realized she was only dreaming.

Unless you have been diagnosed with schizophrenia, you probably do not experience hallucinations on a regular basis. But every now and then the average person will be caught in a world between wakefulness and sleep, resulting in an obvious distortion of reality. Psychologists call these strange phenomena hypnagogic hallucinations.

It happened to me not long ago. During a hot summer day, our kitchen was invaded by small black ants, probably looking for water. That night, as I was falling asleep in bed, I thought I could see those pesky ants crawling around on my blankets. My impression was that I was fully awake and that there was going to be another battle between me and the ants. But, when I turned on the light to start my attack, the ants completely disappeared. I remember feeling immediate relief, no ants... but then I was left with a very disturbing question: Was I losing my grasp on reality?

Just knowing that the ants were only dream-like hallucinations brought great relief to me, because the alternatives were 1) there were indeed ants in my bed, or 2) I was developing a psychosis. Neither of these two alternatives sounded very appealing at all.

If you ever experience a hypnagogic hallucination, my hope is that you will feel some comfort by recognizing it for what it truly is. Although many people have these strange experiences on a regular basis they certainly do not get much press or public recognition. In fact, most people have never heard of hypnagogic hallucinations, even if they have experienced them many times.

Surveys have found that over 50 percent of the population report experiencing hypnagogic hallucinations on a regular basis as they fall asleep. Another 12.5 percent of people in community samples describe strange perceptions that occur while waking up, and these are referred to as hypnopompic hallucinations. In either case the people believe themselves to be fully awake but in actuality they are in a transitional stage between sleep and wakefulness.

Sometimes these hallucinations can be very disturbing. For example, people often report seeing large spiders on the walls, feeling as if they are floating or possibly lying on the ceiling, defying gravity. Sometimes people feel paralyzed and unable to move. Other times they may feel as if someone is present with them in the bedroom or they may hear voices when no one is there. Fortunately, the hallucinations abate the moment the person gets up to turn on a light because this action helps them wake up completely.

We know that stress, broken sleep, pregnancy and certain medications make these hallucinations more likely to happen. While Job was going through his time of testing he cried out, "When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions" (Job 7:13-14). During times of trials

these "visions" seem to come with greater frequency.

When left to our own devices to explain psychological phenomena such as hypnagogic hallucinations some individuals come to the conclusion that they are under demonic attack, or that they are seeing ghosts, or possibly that they are being abducted by aliens. None of these conclusions are correct, obviously. The litmus test is simply this: if it disappears when you get up and turn on the lights, then it was all of your own creation. These hallucinations are documented psychological phenomena that most people experience from time to time.

Personally, I would much rather admit to having an occasional hypnagogic hallucination than believe the hallucination is real.

I also find it comforting that God's Word says He will never leave us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and this applies whether we are awake or asleep. We can lie down and sleep in safety, says the psalmist (Psalm 3:5; 4:8) and we know that Jesus promises rest for the weary (Matthew 11:28-30).

So tonight while falling asleep, if you get invaded by ants, or have strangers in your room, or find yourself on the ceiling looking down at the floor, try to remember that this is only a dream, and all will be OK as soon as you turn on the light.



Daniel Jenkins, Ph.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist at Lighthouse Psychological Services in Mission Valley. He is also a professor of psychology at Point

Loma Nazarene University. Learn more at www.lighthousepsy.com.

JANICE THOMPSON

Power-up principle: Radical generosity

As I have traveled throughout the world, I have observed that Americans are among the most generous people on the planet. We are certainly a blessed people who give with an open hand and a compassionate heart to those in need. We are moved by those whose lives have been torn apart by war and natural disasters. We give our possessions to charities that care for the poor, knowing that our extra blanket, coat or gift of food might just mean survival to someone in desperate need.

As we now enter the season of the year that focuses our attention on thankfulness and generosity, I want to introduce you to some strategies that can turbocharge your giving. There are so many thoughtful and intelligent ways to give. Consider this: About 7 percent of an American's wealth is in cash. The remaining 93 percent is comprised of other types of assets such as stocks, real estate, business interests and other kinds of valuable personal property. The key to unlocking your giving potential *with this 93 percent* is a willingness to approach your giving with the same level of attention you devote to your other financial matters. Let's look at two simple strategies that can power up your generosity before year-end.

• **The Donor Advised Fund (DAF).** A DAF is simply a *giving fund* that acts like a charitable bank account for you. Managed by a qualified charitable foundation, it provides a very simple, flexible and cost-effective solution for your giving goals. Not sure where or how much to give to a particular charity? No problem. You can donate your gift now, receive an immediate tax deduction for your gift, and decide later which charities you want to support. Do you want to remain anonymous? You have that flexibility, too. I also love using this tool to engage the entire family in giving

priorities.

• **Gifted Appreciated Assets.** Giving non-cash assets that have grown in value is a smart way to give. Instead of selling a stock, paying capital gains tax and gifting the proceeds, gift the stock directly instead. You can also use this tool to rebalance your portfolio in a tax-efficient manner. Have a stock that is dominating your portfolio? Planning to give a year-end cash gift? Consider gifting some of that stock instead, contribute the designated cash to your portfolio, and then rebalance your portfolio. The DAF works quite well with this strategy.

If you are a business owner, or own substantial appreciated non-cash assets, or you have an estate tax problem, there are many more exciting planning opportunities for intentional, tax-wise generosity. In fact, many of the greatest opportunities for radical generosity can be found with these types of assets. The keys to unlocking your giving potential begins with discovering your goals, understanding your current situation, developing an appropriate strategy with a qualified professional team, and then implementing a plan around those goals.

• **Legacy Gifts.** No overview of radical generosity would be complete without addressing what happens to all you have worked so hard for when this life is done. According to the National Christian Foundation, Americans spend about *40 years* accumulating wealth and about *40 minutes* planning how it will be distributed after they are gone. Thankfully, I'm personally seeing more and more families interested in *intentionally* preparing the next generation before they receive the family's wealth. We have probably all heard of, or may have personally observed, the damage done



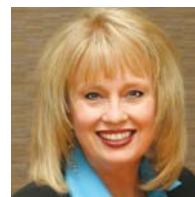
to those who received an inheritance without being prepared to wisely manage it.

There are many ways to establish a legacy of generosity with your family that allows you to transfer *your values before your valuables* and *your wisdom before your wealth* to the next generation. I encourage you to spend some time discovering meaningful ways to accomplish this worthy goal.

As 2014 heads into the home stretch, now is the perfect time to begin exploring a plan to give to those causes that touch your heart and bless others. God cares deeply about the local church, the persecuted, the widows and the orphans. The invisible, lonely and forgotten are never out of His sight. All people matter, all of creation matters! And keep in mind, radical generosity isn't measured just by the size of the gift but by the motivation of the heart as well.

Remember the widow's mite (see Mark 12:42)?

Whether we can give a little or a lot, this woman is a great example to each of us of *radical generosity*.



Janice Thompson is a certified financial planner and co-founder/CEO of One Degree Advisors, Inc. A frequent speaker on financial topics and mentor for financial

professionals, she also serves on the board of directors for Kingdom Advisors. Learn more at www.onedegreeadvisors.com.

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3 life-changing ways to maximize kid time

All of us want to live life without major regrets, but only some of us actually do something about it.

I read recently about a man who quit his demanding and time-consuming \$100 million job because he felt guilt and regret from not spending time with his 10-year-old daughter. In fact, she had handed him a list of 22 events—from her first day at school to her first soccer match to a parent-teacher meeting—that he had missed. He got the point.

It was a wonderful reminder that drastic actions in life sometimes are necessary if we are to be family-oriented, even if we cannot afford to quit our jobs.

I have three young children who take most of my attention, so I think a lot about the subjects of regret, priorities and time.

The Bible can guide us here. In Psalm 39, the psalmist asks God to remind him “how fleeting my life is” and to show him “the number of my days.” The psalmist calls life a “mere breath,” describes much of the world’s chasing after wealth as pointless (Psalm 39:6), and then cries out to God: “My hope is in You.”

What was the psalmist’s point?

Keep your focus on eternal matters, not fleeting and temporary ones. Of course, there is a time for fun and games (Ecclesiastes 3:4), but they shouldn’t consume us. And they shouldn’t constantly distract us from more important

things.

I’ll have about 1,800 days with each of my children before they reach kindergarten. That sounds like a lot, but it’s really not. Each day speeds past me like a Daytona racecar. Those days turn into weeks, those weeks roll over into months, and those months into years. Life with small kids is never boring, and time really does “fly.” Pretty soon, that little boy that I held in my two hands as a newborn is walking off to school,

giving me a goodbye high five—slapping that same hand that literally held him some 1,800 days earlier. Five years later he’ll be 10, and five years later, he’ll be wanting to drive.

How, then, do we raise our children without later having regret?

How do we maximize our time with our kids—without stressing ourselves out in the process? Here are three suggestions:

1 Get new priorities

I vividly remember the night before my son was born, thinking to myself: What will fatherhood really be like? Behind that question was another question: Will I still get to watch every football and basketball game my teams play? Will I get to spend my time with all my hobbies? The answer, of course, was a resounding “no,” but I didn’t realize fatherhood would be so wonderful that it didn’t matter. If our parenting years mirror our bachelor/bachelorette years, something is wrong. When we have the right priorities—and we truly

put our family ahead of personal desires—our day-to-day decisions will be radically different. And more rewarding.

2 Get a new perspective

When we comprehend the brevity of life—how we’re here only for a few years and then gone—it changes how we view everything. It transforms our perspective. God calls us to have an eternal focus, to live each week with an eye toward heaven. But so often we don’t, and we make decisions based solely on temporary pleasures. In just a few decades, we’ll all be gone. How will you and I be remembered? What eternal impact will you and I have made? If, when you woke up this morning, you had known that it would be your last day with your family, would you have done anything differently? (Of course. I would have, too.)

3 Get rejuvenated

Get away. My worst parenting moments occur when I’m tired, stressed out or hungry. On those days, I’m in no mood to “maximize” the time with my children. Jesus dealt with identical physical needs and emotions. What did He do? Simple: He slept. He relaxed. He ate. He didn’t rush from town to town, and He didn’t try to squeeze 27 hours of ministry into a 24-hour day. He simply accomplished the will of the Father. He even withdrew to “desolate places” to pray (Luke 5:16). As the Southwest airline commercials put it, he “got away.” If the Son of God needed physical and spiritual rejuvenation, then how much more do you and I?



Michael Foust is the father of three small children, a writer and editor, and blogs about parenting at www.michaelfoust.com.

Being thankful, no matter the view

This is the time of year to be thankful. Whether we are ready or not, summer is officially in the rearview mirror, and we are supposed to be thankful for the changes that come as we journey into a new season.

The difficulty comes when we look at our lives through the front windshield; sometimes it is hard to be thankful for what we see ahead of us, the problems we must face, the obstacles we must avoid, the people we have to confront, the pain we must survive.

Just flipping the page on the calendar will not change what we see through the front windshield of our lives.

I don't know what the view is through the windshield of your life. I can tell you that, for some, November means family tensions that we have avoided for months will now be present at the holiday table.

For others, November means the last few miles before the end-of-the-year financial pressures come due. You had hoped to catch up by now, but no matter the effort there are simply more bills to pay than there are pages on the calendar to turn.

For others, November reminds you about the kids who went away to school promising to stay in touch, and yet you seldom hear from them. You knew letting them go would be difficult, you just never thought it would feel like this.

When we look through the front windshield and find it hard to be thankful for what is before us, we need to pull this car we call "Life" to the side of the road and look in the rear-view mirror. Something happens to our perspective when we pause and reflect back on who God is and what He has done for us. When we look in the rearview mirror, we see how all the obstacles and difficulties of past seasons were met by the promises of God. This brief pause, this

moment of reflection in the rearview mirror, reminds us how faithful God has been and how His promises have steered us through the difficult times.

Why wouldn't He do the same with what is before us?

Can I ask ... How does the road before you look? Are you finding it hard to be thankful? Reading a few lines in a greeting card just won't get you there, will it? A few decorations around the house will momentarily lift your spirits, but for us to give thanks in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18), something has to change our perspective or thankfulness will fall from our hearts like the leaves from the trees.

The writer of Psalm 119 says in verse 116, "LORD, sustain me as you promised, that I may live! Do not let my hope be crushed." God is the giver and sustainer of life. As we drive through the seasons of life, we often forget to be thankful because we are focused on the view through the front windshield. We are concentrating so much on the bumps in the road, the detours and the traffic that we forget to be thankful for what we have and for what God is doing. For some, driving one more mile in our present circumstances seems impossible. Your tank is almost empty and you passed the off-ramp to thankfulness a few miles back.

I can tell you from personal experience, the view through the front windshield is scary at times. It can rob you of your joy and fog your perspective of

what God is doing. If thankfulness has eluded you this season, pull your car over. Look in the rearview mirror for a moment. Has He ever let you down? Have you ever found His promises to not be true?

Whatever you see ahead of you know that your Creator promises to steer you to safety. Let Him drive. Resist the temptation to take the wheel. The road may appear difficult to navigate, but one day you will look in the rearview



mirror and realize just what the psalmist promised. God has sustained you through the journey. God has not allowed your hope to be crushed. And my guess—on the side of the road—peering through the rear view mirror, you will be thankful no matter the view.



Chico Goff is the senior pastor of Mission Hills Church in San Marcos.

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Dance of the jingling multitasker

I'm trying to make a pie crust, which isn't easy to do when you're also trying to write a column. It's not that I'm a terrible baker or a terrible writer. I'm pretty good at both tasks (although my presentation of words is much prettier than my presentation of pie).

No, my problem is that I'm a terrible multitasker.

When I was a kid, the running joke was that I couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time. I probably couldn't run and tell a joke at the same time either, but we'll never know. When I was in kindergarten, I got run over by a classmate while we were doing laps in the gym. That pretty much put me off running for the rest of my life.

I used to feel inadequate because of my lack of multitasking abilities, until I learned that multitasking isn't the ability to do two things at the same time. It's the ability to quickly switch back and forth between two tasks. That's a little better, but not much help when the tasks you're doing need to appear as if they're simultaneous.

Like when you're belly dancing.

As part of my "I'm 50 and trying new things" mentality, I recently signed up for a one-night belly dancing class. I almost backed out because of pain in my hips, but I'm also learning that in order to stay out of pain I need to move when I'm in pain, which I guess is actually doing two things at the same time. But I digress.

The goal of the hour-long class was to master a very short routine that consisted of simple steps and hand movements. The instructor brought some of her own jingly scarves for us to wear, so that when we shook our hips we could hear the jingles jangle.

We started by learning some hand movements, which, the instructor said, basically meant doing whatever we

wanted as long as we felt pretty. We could flutter our fingers or wiggle our wrists or make bird wings with our arms. Flap, flap. Look at me! I'm dancing!

The next part of the lesson involved a series of dance steps coupled with hip shakes. Step forward with your right foot, shake your right hip, jangle your jingle scarf. Step forward with your left foot, shake your left hip, jangle your jingle scarf. Step, shake, jangle. Step, shake, jangle.

We repeated the steps, moving forward and backward, and then to our left and right. So far, so good, although the pain in my hips was starting to amp up. In fact, after just one round of steps I wasn't able to actually shake my hips to jangle my jingle scarf. Instead, I just grabbed the ends of the scarf and jangled by hand.

Things got a little more difficult when we learned to turn. Not only did I have to pay attention to my own steps, hip shakes and scarf jangles, but I also had to watch out for another woman in the class whose turns took up the entire dance floor. While most of us turned in our own little spot, she started at one end of the room and wound up clear on the other side, usually pinning me to the wall with her wild hand and hip movements.

I cut her a break. Obviously she was unable to think and spin at the same time. We multitasking failures need to stick together.

Once we got down the basic steps,



we set them to music. And that's when the trouble really started. The steps that I could manage one at a time were now sped up to happen in the same beat. Add in the hand movements and the rogue spinner, and I was in over my head.

While everyone else was doing stepshakajangle, I was still on step. By the time I got to shaking my hip, the rest of the class was spinning.

When I was ready to spin, everyone else was finished. During our second run through of the routine, all I could do was stand in place and tap my foot. The

only hand movement I could manage was to jangle my jingle scarf.

Fortunately, our instructor told us that in belly dancing, you can pretty much do whatever you want as long as you feel good and are having fun. I guess the class was a success then, because I really had fun with the jingle scarf.

In fact, I might get one to wear when I'm writing a column. Fortunately, I can think and jingle at the same time.



Award-winning freelance writer Joanne Brokaw spends her days dreaming of things she'd like to do but probably never will—like swimming with dolphins, cleaning

the attic and someday overcoming the trauma of elementary school picture day. She lives with two dogs, a cat, six chickens and one very patient husband. Learn more at www.joanbrokaw.com.

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