

I Am Loved

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My Refuge

You are my refuge and my shield; I have put my hope in your word.
—Psalm 119:114, NIV

The snow-moistened January garden seems to be whispering, “Remember me?” and “Who are you?”

Indeed, the icy grip of winter had kept me away from it for far too long. Winter stretches wide and mean over the land, but the garden is a magnet. It calls me to it. And as I amble along its earthen floors this morning, though the cold air makes my head and hands feel numb, I am drawn to my garden with renewed enthusiasm.

I want to give in to these feelings inside me and begin working the soil. I want to sow a thousand seeds and start dividing the foliage of the hostas, but a gust of wind that scatters restless leaves around my feet reminds me that this is only January.

My eyes study the silent garden: its rugged nakedness, the ashen shades of winter that paint its anatomy with the sadness of the graveyard, which reminds me of humanity’s inexorable fate.


Each fallen leaf and bare tree limb; each vanished perennial of yesterday; and every needle, snag, and organic debris accumulating on the garden’s floor—all are brutal tokens of finitude and hopelessness. They shout, “You shall ‘return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return’ ” (Genesis 3:19, NKJV).

The feeling of inevitability is overwhelming. Then suddenly from my peripheral vision bursts the sight of gentle, velvety light emanating from the hurricane lamp sitting by my kitchen window. Light comes in threads of unpretentious coppery gold, melting the gloominess of my thoughts. A burnished glow flows like honey all over my soul, and my spirit is soon revived with optimism and faith.

My warm, illuminated home is a reminder of God’s promises. He is the light from which humanity derives life. He is our secure Place of Refuge from the storms of life.

My mind has been quieted. My heart, assured.

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22, NKJV).



January 2

Medical Miracle

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray
for each other so that you may be healed.

The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

—James 5:16, NIV

When my husband and I left the maternity ward after our second child, a son, was born, we didn't look like new parents at all. We didn't walk out to our car carefully carrying a swaddled bundle to strap into his car seat for his first ride home. No, we left the maternity ward with our overnight bags and lots of bottles for breast milk. My perfect pregnancy had ended after only thirty-nine weeks—and forty-five minutes of intense labor. Because of his fast arrival, baby Lucas was “singing” due to fluid in his lungs. Seconds after his birth, he was taken to the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

I had only a few seconds to hold him and then let him go.

We were completely unprepared for the next eight days: scrubbing our hands before getting to hold him, watching his little heels being poked, seeing nurses weigh each soiled diaper, finding terms like *oxygen stats* and *respiratory distress syndrome (RDS)* slip into our conversation. While some parents are warned about premature birth and a possible stay at NICU, many do not know what lies ahead until they get there. Yet no matter the circumstances, you soon realize that your baby still needs your love and care, which no technology or hospital staff can provide.

Every time we walked into NICU, we could read the pain, stress, tears, fears, doubts, and sadness of the parents there. This medical unit cradles much sorrow and pressure. We couldn't help but pray for those babies. One by one, they were pronounced strong enough to be sent home. Had we never had our own little warrior there, we never would have thought to pray for NICU babies—especially the way we did. We have learned to pray and uplift others who might be in the same boat at the time ours was being tossed by waves of pain and tears.

Unlike other babies, Lucas was not hooked to any oxygen mask, nor was he placed in an incubator. He was fighting and learning to breathe on his own. Today he is a perfectly happy baby. He is in good health and a joy to us and his big sister.

Firsthand, we experienced the spiritual connection between prayer and healing. Truly, “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (James 5:16, NIV).

Sylvana Ramhit-Randriamialison

The Marketplace

So even to old age and gray hairs,
 O God, do not forsake me,
 till I proclaim thy might
 to all the generations to come.
 —*Psalm 71:18, RSV*

In my eighties, I'm supposed to be a retired freelance writer, but continuing in the marketplace remains my personal goal of ministry. So why choose to continue meeting deadlines, sometimes under the pressure of getting an assignment today that the business needed yesterday? Meeting deadlines is vital; being dependable results in future assignments. Even more, the employers know I'm a Christian, honor the Sabbath hours, and accept only those assignments that mesh with my Christian mores. At the same time, I offer to do whatever possible to better the businesses that hire me. I recall inspirational admonition about heeding opportunities: "God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them."*

Thus, serving others in the marketplace remains my option even though I'm no longer able to be "out there" physically due to handicaps. My work is generated from home, while I am propped in a recliner to ease my pain issues. Interviews are done via email by providing questions to the interviewee, with the individual's responses. Due to my hearing loss, the telephone also isn't an option. So how is it possible to make an impact? By being ethical and dependable and never missing deadlines. Often, those who employ me inquire about my beliefs, and we become friends. The Heart Hunter, Jesus, is the Headhunter for the tasks He wants me to do.

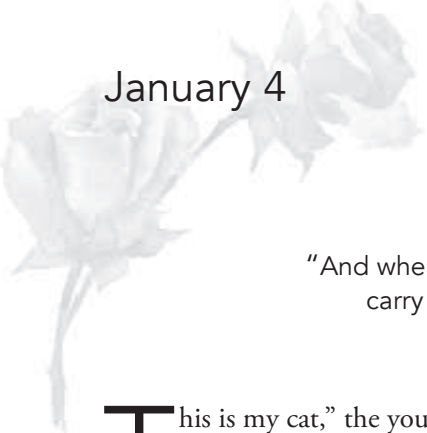
Because of technology, even for the able-bodied, much of the marketplace work is done at home these days. Most interviewees prefer using email because they can respond on their own time schedule without adding another meeting to their day planner. Therefore, I don't have to relegate myself to the has-been corner by giving up serving community needs.

I've found if I fail to go beyond the church walls, to share Jesus in the marketplace by serving in the community, I'll miss out on some of the best opportunities to witness for Him. And I'll miss out on some of the finest friendships. "I can do all things through Christ" (Philippians 4:13, NKJV).

The promise is sure, so I continue to serve others through writing.
 May God be blessed!

Betty Kossick

* Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press®, 2002), 223.



January 4

Found

“And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders.”

—Luke 15:5, NLT

This is my cat,” the young woman said. I looked at Buster lying placidly in the arms of this stranger standing on my back porch.

“Buster is your cat?” I asked stupidly.

It was very early in the morning.

“Buster?” Now she looked confused. “This is Cujo. He’s thirteen. I’ve had him his whole life. He was born on the floor of my closet at home. He disappeared three weeks ago.”

Ah. Disappeared. Three weeks ago. The gears were clicking now.

“I’ve been looking everywhere.”

I grinned. “I’m so glad you found him,” I said. “He’s just the sweetest little guy. He turned up here . . . three weeks ago.”

She looked relieved.

“We’ve been feeding him, and we put this bed out for him,” I said, pointing.

She smiled.

“We’ve been calling him Buster.”

“Thanks for taking care of him,” she said.

As I watched Buster/Cujo leaving in his mistress’s vehicle, I reflected on his great escape/grand adventure. We sometimes make similar moves—we chafe and itch to get out and away to taste “freedom,” to experience a life other than the one we’ve been so lavishly provided.

Some of us have slipped out of our Master’s house. We may even have enjoyed it. We certainly did not apprehend our true peril, just as Buster couldn’t have his. But it’s very, very dangerous “out there.”

We’re safest where we belong—with the One who knows us and loves us.

With the One who comes looking when we disappear.

I waved at Buster; I hoped he would stay in and safe.

I believe I’ll do the same.

Carolyn K. Karlstrom

Erased Files

You will again have compassion on us;
you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all
our iniquities into the depths of the sea.

—Micah 7:19, NIV

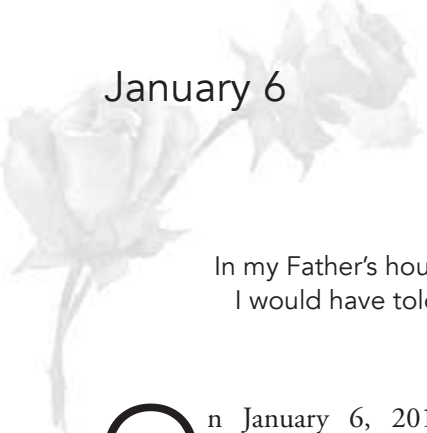
There have been a number of scandals in the news in recent years regarding erased computer files. One was in connection with the Internal Revenue Service, and one involved a presidential candidate. Based on the excuses, they are so very sorry, but everything was deleted, and nothing can be done about it. But various experts said that it is actually very difficult to completely erase things from a computer hard drive. The things remain somewhere and can possibly be retrieved, although they have not been at the time of this writing.

My husband has done a great deal of study on Roman culture and the army during the time of Christ. He has handcrafted armor and many of the items a Roman soldier might have carried and used. One of the things he made is a tablet (*tabla*). When I first saw it, I thought it a bit far-fetched. But then we spent some time going to museums in Germany where many Roman items have been discovered, as the Romans had had a number of forts in that area. And there in one of the museums I saw a *tabla* almost exactly like the one my husband had crafted. It was probably something like that on which Zechariah wrote, “His name is John” (Luke 1:63, NIV).

The *tabla* (from which we get the word *tablet*) was one or two flat wood pieces hollowed out, leaving a half-inch frame. The hollow area was filled with beeswax darkened by powdered charcoal. Writing was done with a stylus. The flat end of the stylus could “erase” any errors. To completely clear the *tabla*, it could be exposed to the sun or the heat of a flame, melting the wax.

As I showed the tablet to someone, it struck me that there is a spiritual lesson in it. Just as the message on the *tabla* can be erased by the sun, so our sins can be erased by the Son. And unlike a computer hard drive, it is not there anymore at all—it can never be brought back. It is gone once and for all. What a precious promise we find in 1 John 1:9: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (NIV).

But it is more than that—the sins are gone, gone, never to appear again. “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isaiah 43:25, NIV). Just like the writing on the *tabla*, the sin is gone, never to be found or seen again.



January 6

Home

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so,
I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

—John 14:2, KJV

On January 6, 2012, New Mexico celebrated its one-hundredth anniversary of being admitted as a state to the United States of America. This induction was a very long time in coming because it took over sixty years from when the territory first applied in 1850.

I love my home state, and given just a smidge of a chance, I will tell you about the beautiful mountains, rivers, and streams. The majestic Red Cliffs of sandstone and the dramatic deep canyons of the Rio Grande Gorge and the Canadian River can take your breath away. The state is dotted with over one thousand volcanic cones with names like Cabezon and Shiprock, which show the magnificence of their eruptions. The Sandia Mountains also attest to their formations by finding the exact same strata on the other side of Albuquerque. Carlsbad Caverns National Park provides a massive variety of caves exhibiting unusual beauty.

The wide, flat plains stretching from north to south on the state's eastern side afford farming and other agriculture pursuits. Oil, gas, and water are buried deep underneath the plains. Mountains and mesas cover the western part of the state, where the Continental Divide rises from Mexico to Canada.

The northern mountains sometimes retain snow year-round. People enjoy climbing and skiing on them. Milder weather in the south throughout the year adds to the beauty of the high desert. The whole state is dotted with beautiful lakes and streams and mighty rivers.

But New Mexico is more than its beautiful land. We are a multicultural state and blessed with wonderful varieties of foods. Sand colors range from white to black with all colors in between. One can walk on ancient paths of Native Americans or tour the Santa Fe Trail, which brought the pioneers in covered wagons. The Very Large Array or Sunspot telescopes let you look into the heavens. You can also visit the White Sands Space Harbor or Spaceport America.

I love New Mexico. But it pales in comparison to the place Jesus has gone to prepare for us. I can have some idea of the beauty He is planning for us. He will come to get us, so we will not need to launch from a space harbor or spaceport to get to heaven! I can hardly wait!

Mary E. Dunkin

Lessons From the Sunflowers

Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world.
He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness,
but have the light of life."
—John 8:12, NKJV

Look," my attendant said delightedly. "The sunflowers are blooming." I wheeled to the garden to see for myself. In front of some zucchini plants were beautiful sunflowers stretching their heads up to the sun—their power source. Most tilted toward the sun. But the last two in that floral line-up seemed confused. They faced each other instead. As the days continued and the drought increased, I noticed something even more remarkable. Those last two flowers were actually facing the sunlight from their unique angle. The zucchini plants had edged them forward. Two days later, I noticed four other big, bold sunflowers nearby that had grown to over seven feet.

As the drought progressed and the cold weather crept on, I noticed that some flowers wilted while others blossomed even more profusely. I prayed to understand the lessons I knew were embedded in that experience. Needing a deeper, more meaningful relationship with Christ, I searched the Bible, my penultimate guide, to know exactly how to establish that deep friendship. The words of many of its inspired authors pointed me to the light metaphor. Paul uses the light metaphor to describe who we are and where we are. "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light" (Ephesians 5:8, NKJV). Ellen G. White reflected that truth when she penned these beautiful words: "As the flower turns to the sun, that the bright beams may aid in perfecting its beauty and symmetry, so should we turn to the Sun of Righteousness, that heaven's light may shine upon us, that our character may be developed into the likeness of Christ."*

Those sunflowers taught me four wonderful lessons. First, focus on the Light—my personal Source of His redeeming power. Second, walk as a child of the Light and soak up His blessings. Next, lean on a mature believer to "stake" us from elements that counteract our growth process. Finally, search for blessings that bud with hope, developing a Christlikeness that shines outward. *Heavenly Light and Creator, You are my power Source.*

Glenda-mae Greene

* Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1956), 68.