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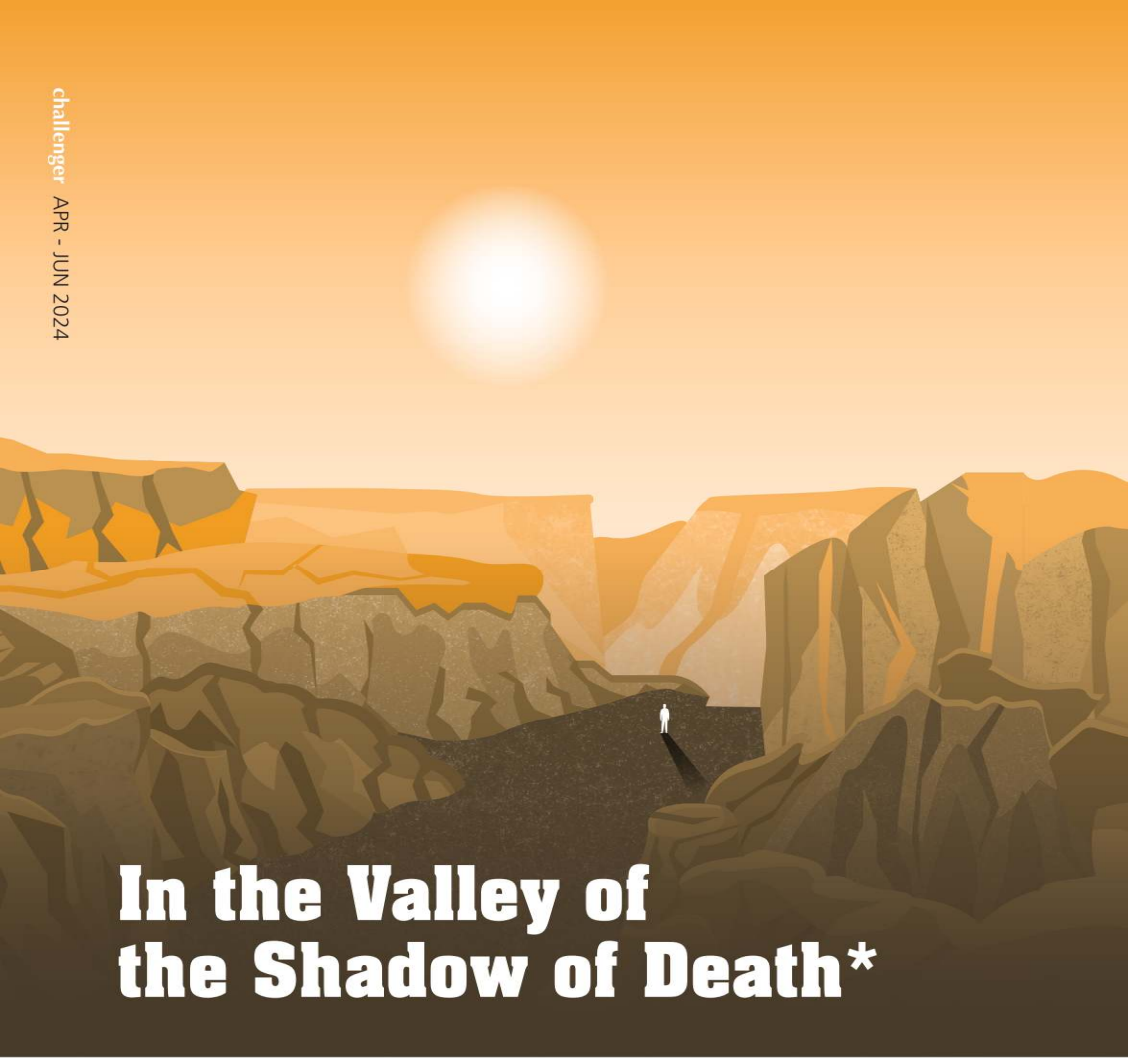
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APR-JUN 24

In the Valley of the Shadow of Death

/ Letters for Panda, Who Is in Heaven
/ Blessed to Be a Blessing!
/ A Timely Stranger
/ Nature Speaks of God

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In the Valley of the Shadow of Death*

by Li Hong

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

I have two rare congenital genetic diseases: progressive muscular dystrophy, which weakens my

physical strength gradually, and myocardial noncompaction, which causes my heart to weaken gradually. Even though God granted me a gift for learning—and through self-empowerment and perseverance I got into Peking University—no matter how hard I try, I cannot triumph over my illnesses.

As early as 17 years ago, the doctor pronounced that I only had a few months left to live. At that time, I met God and called out to Him for help. I celebrated my 50th birthday in November 2022! However, I am growing weaker and eventually must prepare myself for meeting Jesus Christ. Looking back on my short life, the grace and mercy of God are greater than what I asked and what I imagined. How can I not give thanks and sing praise? Hallelujah!

What Is Life For?

Since I was young, I was taught to be an atheist, so I firmly believed that my destiny lay solely in my hands. I worked extra hard and got into Peking University. But when I was 20, the symptoms of my congenital diseases became more pronounced. I struggled for six long years before graduating. When my classmates asked me about my future goal, somehow, I blurted out: "To pursue truth."

Two years later, I finally left my small hometown and embarked on the difficult path of working. Due to my body condition and discrimination in society, I drifted aimlessly for a few years. I eventually went to Shenzhen. God had prepared a place for me there. I started working for an internet company established by persons with disabilities. As my academic qualifications were the highest

among them, it was natural that I was responsible for all technical duties.

Staying busy at work with the eager wish to change the destiny of the disabled stopped me from thinking about anything more. Yet, there were always some nights when I would think: To be carrying such burdens and always laboring, if it's only for survival, then what's the meaning of living?

One year I participated in the national vocational skills competition for the disabled and heard the Gospel for the first time. At that time, one of my university schoolmates worked in Shanghai, and after the competition, he took me to a church in Shanghai. My classmate was not a Christian, but his friend who accompanied us was. Having listened to the pastor's sermon, I basically understood nothing, but I did take to heart one thing Jesus said: *"I am the way, the truth, and the life."*

Afterwards, I had the chance to participate in the international vocational skills competition for the disabled in India, along with the national team. I heard that India was a "scary" place, as the water was filthy, and the mosquitoes were poisonous. Before we went on the trip, our team leader repeatedly warned us that we could only drink bottled water. I was a bit worried as my stomach has always been easily

upset. Even though I didn't know God, I made a wish: "If things go well on the trip, I will definitely go look for the true God." At last, I came back unscathed!

Encountering the Gospel

One night in February 2004, I was working overtime till late. I read an article on an online literary forum by a disabled poet, Shi-ying, with whom I felt a deep connection. So, I found her articles and read them all. I firmly believed that she was the person I would spend the rest of my life with. With the convenience of the internet, I sent her an email at once, expressing my desire to know her in depth. In our email exchanges, I learned that she was a Christian, and her requirement for accepting me was that I, too, must become a Christian.

At that time, admittedly, love was a push factor for me to pursue the Gospel, yet I was in a confusing time, yearning to find direction for my soul. Perhaps some people with illnesses or disabilities would feel conflicted when they listened to the Gospel: Why did God make me this way? Or, they seek faith to find healing. At that time, what I urgently needed was a way to search for the meaning of life for the sake of my soul.

I digitally downloaded a Bible at once and took a deep dive into it. As I read, I kept referencing my own

experiences and gradually felt a resonance. One day, I got the idea to visit a church, so I walked all the way there on my own, leaning only on my cane. I ended up taking the wrong path, traveling extra distance. When I got to the church and took a seat on a bench in the corridor, I was spent, my waist aching intensely. It was not a Sunday and the church sat in quietness. Then from a closed door on the side came the faint singing of praise. It was in this quietness and bliss, that I first felt touched by the Holy Spirit.

My Sins Forgiven

When I was learning about the Bible and continuously communicating with my girlfriend, Shi-ying, I understood that sin entered this world when Adam disobeyed God—and so did death. Diseases are an advocate for death, my flawed genes included. Not only does the incomplete body of man fail, but his soul is also corrupted by ever-spreading sin, so that he cannot save himself from the depths of it.

But how was I innocent? In times of difficulty, didn't I curse the employers who would not give the disabled a chance? Didn't I grow bitter and vindictive when I encountered rejection after rejection in society? Didn't I blame my parents for my congenital diseases? These are all sinful thoughts. My weak body didn't allow me to commit big bad deeds,

but I did do a lot of small bad deeds, some of them even hard to talk about now.

Yet, man is used to sinning. Before knowing the Gospel, I did not discover any way to cleanse my sins, like following the rules, daily introspection, eliminating desires, or daily charitable acts. They were all self-deceptions. If people think they can be cleansed this way and are unaware of the poison clinging to the depths of their soul, they will eventually find themselves caged by sin again.

But from the Bible, I have gradually discovered the way for man to be cleansed. A ransom must be paid for sins in order for man to be saved. I am incapable of repaying this huge sum to God! That is why Jesus came. And, through my repentance, He settled the bill that was owed with His own blood, writing off all my sins! He uprooted the poison in my soul and attached me onto His branches. Since realizing this, I regained the hope of bearing good fruit.

After repenting to God for my sins, my life did change gradually. Before—because I can't walk steadily and trip easily—every time I tripped, I would habitually curse, then get up on my feet begrudgingly. But now, whenever I trip, I quietly say to myself, "Thank you, God," then get up again, knowing God will hold me up. At these moments, tripping has the amazing effect of bringing me joy instead.

Testimony in the Workplace

On May 25, 2005, I was baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ. Unworthy as I am, Jesus used me to be a good example in the technology company without dishonoring the name of God. I was honored by society on multiple occasions. First, I received the Top Ten Skilled Pacemakers recognition. Then the year after, I was nominated as one of the Top Ten Outstanding Young Persons. May all honor be to God who granted me motivation and joy.



The many disabled persons who worked in the corporation learned skills from me and gradually matured into outstanding talents with a foothold in the IT industry. This kind of achievement was unimaginable to my fellow disabled persons in the past.

One time, our corporation faced an immense challenge: a technical difficulty presented itself. If we could not work through it, the corporation's growth would cease, and even the status quo would be hard to maintain. At that time, my subordinates mostly did not have a university education and were inexperienced. Only I had the ability to work it through. However, Shi-ying and I had just held our wedding of thanks and got married before God. I was in a dilemma. Yet, for the corporation, I started staying up late to work.

The Darkest Hour

After a dozen days, I returned home again in the wee hours of the night. My wife was still awake and was

kneeling by our bed praying. The small television by the wall was still on. I sat on our bed, realizing it was playing a cartoon adaptation of Bible stories. Quietly but deeply, the theme song sang: "Many nights we pray, with no proof anyone could hear..."

Why, wasn't this exactly how I felt? My wife worried about my health; I worried for the future of my fellow disabled colleagues. Prayer hadn't seemed to yield any result. The challenge was insurmountable, and I was still overworking myself. I had no idea what God had planned for this. How much did God want me to give to overcome this challenge, or was I only acting out of my own will and pride?

My body finally gave out when the new year was upon us. I briefly handed over my work and was hospitalized. My wife was even blamed by the doctor after consultation: "He was still working under these conditions? Does he have a death wish?"

At that time, the people from church disagreed over what I did as well.



One of the brothers thought I was punished for being proud and arrogant. Yet, when my colleagues came to my ward to give me the good news that the technical difficulty had been overcome a few days later, I knew that God had responded to our one-sided prayers. Now it was up to God to lead me in my critical condition.

After my condition stabilized, the doctor said there was nothing to be done in the hospital and told me to return home for recuperation. After I left the hospital, I gradually passed my duties to my successor and, in the end, left the position entirely. Considering my past performance and previous needs, the person in charge of the corporation kept me on the payroll.

Amazing Grace

At that time, the corporation arranged a car to take me and another colleague with kidney disease to the hospital for follow-up. This colleague was Ma, my apprentice and successor. In the car I never talked much, usually praying with my head low and eyes closed. Sometimes I would hum the song *The Sun Above the Clouds*: “When you soar on high in the sunny sky, or walk through the valley far below the sky, wherever you are, you will see the sun... high above the clouds...”

To my surprise, after some time, Ma

was willing to go to church to learn more about Christianity. Later, he became my brother in Christ. A few of our friends with disabilities were also willing to learn more about the Gospel. So, we held Bible study gatherings at my place. I had once led them technically, but then I became their companion on the path of faith.

As it was inconvenient for the disabled to go to church, under God’s guidance, the church we went to at that time decided to start a new church at my place—Jehovah-Jireh. After the establishment of the new church, we received a lot of support. Brother Yiu from Hong Kong, amid his busy service, was willing to come give a sermon every month at our small church. Some healthy brothers and sisters often came over to serve and help. Through prayer, I also tried my best to share messages from the Bible. A few years later, a young brother from our church was called by God to study in a seminary, so I handed over the baton to him and his wife. I then started focusing on serving God by writing.

The Lily of the Valley

Even though I was gravely ill, everyone who saw me said that I looked very well—not at all like an ill person. It was God who held me up and used an unworthy vessel such as myself. A lot of times when I had no strength or energy, I would remember that in

the Bible, God accepted “the poor widow’s two mites” (Mark 12:41–44). Then I would know that God did not look down on my small offering and would find strength again.

Once, when my life was hanging in the balance, a verse from the Psalms hit right home for me: “*Because I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalms 139:14). Since then, I have stopped fixating on “Why me?” What’s the point of asking, really? There is another verse: “*All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*” (Psalms 139:16). No matter how bumpy or treacherous my life is, God is always there guiding me! Time and again, He turned crisis into safety, fear into peace, sorrow into joy, pain into hope. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Lily of the Valley in the shadow of death, giving out a sweet fragrance. Can you smell it? I now smell it all along the way! ■



Editor’s Note: One week after the author sent us this article, he passed away from COVID and is now with God. The next article was written by his wife.

**This story was first published in Chinese Today, Issue No. 737 (September 2023) and was translated into English by Kiara Ngai.*

Letters for Panda, Who Is in



Letter



One

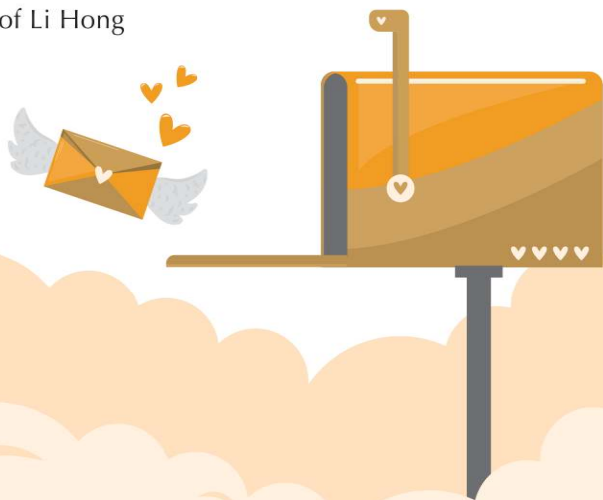
Panda,

I’m not used to calling you Li Hong when I write to you, so I will just call you “Panda” like before. It’s more intimate this way. Today is the 14th day since you went to Heaven, our home above. It must be beautiful there. You must be having fun and running around. In Heaven, there are no tears, no sorrow, no sickness, or suffering.

Do you miss me? Your smile is bright like an angel’s.

Heaven*

by Shi-ying, wife of Li Hong



You didn't recover from COVID. On the night you left, I wanted to call 120 and have you sent to the hospital by ambulance but you refused. You didn't want to suffer anymore; you left like a soldier. I am still struggling with COVID. It has been half a month now. What a torturous, difficult thing, being alive!

I remember our last conversation. I had a high fever. You were on oxygen, lying with a respirator on. I asked if you were suffering a lot. Usually, when you were suffering, you would take it all on your own, not wanting your loved ones to know. But this time, you said you were. I replied

that whether the two of us came out on the other side or not, the Lord Jesus Christ was there with us.

The next morning, you "left" quietly, not letting your mother and me see your last suffering or struggle. I caressed your chest; it was still warm. Your hand, hanging low, was damp with sweat and cold. I called 120 for an ambulance. I also called two of our sisters from church. I washed your face for the last time, buttoned up your down vest, and tucked you in. I didn't want you to be cold.

Our family came from afar overnight to say goodbye to you in the funeral

parlor the next day. I had them help you put on the holy robe of Christ; it was white with a red cross in the middle. Your face brimmed with peace; your lips curled in a smile that was barely there.

The pastor did a prayer of blessing for you. Brothers and sisters from church and our family sang “Onward Christian Soldiers” to escort you to Heaven. *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”* (2 Timothy 4:7). In this life, the two of us, disabled, fought for our lives for 18 years. We went through every difficulty and hardship, but we also experienced God’s mercy and blessing fully.

I have no idea what sorrow is right now. The most important part of my life is lost without you. Every night when I think of you, I talk to you in my head. I turn on your mobile phone to play the songs of praise that you saved. All night, they sing gently to me.

Besides our family, your schoolmates, and your co-workers showing care and comfort to me, the brothers and sisters from church have also given me a lot of love. Every day, I pray that God will give me more strength so that I may get better day by day and recover from COVID.

Panda, you need to cheer me on in Heaven and watch over me, okay?



Panda,

Do you miss me in Heaven? I miss you.

When I miss you, I talk to you for a bit. You loved it when I babbled. If I didn't, you would be anxious, knowing that I was upset. Whenever I talked, you were always all smiles, relaxed. You would hold my hand from time to time, and we could feel each other's warmth. I still remember the warmth of your chest.

It's snowing in my hometown. Snow falling everywhere; it's freezing. I haven't gone back for winter in so many years.

After 18 days, I have finally recovered from COVID, testing negative. Now, I practice standing every day, trying to regain my lost strength. I pray that God will hold me up, heal me, and replenish my strength so that I can visit my father, who is also sick with COVID.

Every night, I hold my mother's hands in prayer, praying for every family member, including your parents and your sister and her family. I pray that God would give us peace for this new year in the aftermath of what has happened.

The sun is finally out. A rare ray of sunlight. I am under the sun, thinking of you—thinking of the times we bathed in the sunshine. Looking at the clouds floating past, I am wondering: Are you here with me hiding behind the clouds?

In the harsh winter of 2022, a lot of families broke apart because of the pandemic—even the winds cried in sorrow. Every day when I wake up, I cry to the Lord, with my hands on my heart, that I may get up from my bed, be back on the normal track of life, and move onwards slowly.

My sister finally agreed to spend Lunar New Year's Eve with me and father in the hospital. I bought the New Year's goods online, as well as daily necessities and food for my mother, wanting to lessen the burden on my family so I won't have time to dwell in sorrow, guilt, or sadness.

Some days may only be endured. In the 18 years that we lived together,

God's invisible hand supported us, and many times we could only power through. You have always hoped that I could be a female warrior of bravery and valor. But I have always been a scaredy-cat. My instinct is to run when there is suffering. But in the end, I cling to God's hand for dear life and feel a little safer.

Is God, slowly and imperceptibly, turning me into you? Turning me into the person that you expected? Magnanimous, perceptive, focused, and composed? I miss your smiling face because you would always smile when you saw me. You have given me most of my smiles. I found our old videos on my phone, and I thought I would cry, but I didn't. I was joyful. These memories remind me that we are only separated in body, but not in soul.

Lunar New Year's Eve is only two days away. Spring is upon us. I know you are joyful and content in Heaven; this is my comfort on Earth.



Author and her husband

The author bids farewell to her husband for the last time

Do you miss me up there? If you do, bless me deeply. Bless our parents and family members with a peaceful New Year.

I pray that I will be like a wilted branch that sprouts again in the spring.



Panda,

You have been gone for one whole month! I count the days since you left—otherwise, I wouldn't remember what day it is.

Many times, I stare at our wedding picture hanging on the wall of our bedroom and remember our pre-wedding photo shoot. I couldn't push you around in your wheelchair, and I had second thoughts, worried that I might not be able to take care of you later. But you said that, in



Wedding picture

this world, it is not difficult to find a caregiver, but it is very difficult to meet a soulmate. You said it was God's gift that we found each other amidst hundreds of thousands.

I know you are in Heaven, not suffering anymore. It is beautiful there. In the month since you left, my tears only fell twice, quietly, in front of God, in the depths of night, when Mother was sound asleep. Sometimes I feel like my life is as light and as unpredictable as a feather. Sometimes I feel like life is like cracking rocks in the worst earthquake. I need God's hand to put my broken heart back together again.

I am not counting on another person to love me like you did in this life. I just cling to what God says, *"Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"* (Jeremiah 31:3).

I pray that you are running in Heaven as a youth does, my love! ■



Editor's Note: The author of this article is the wife of Li Hong, the author of the previous article. The letters were abridged.

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Blessed to Be a Blessing!

by LoiBeth King

The year 1994 was an exciting time in our lives. After 20 years of separation from my family in Vietnam, my husband and I were planning what was to be a life-changing trip to be reunited with them. During the Vietnam War, I had been separated from my family and grew up in an orphanage in Vietnam and then in a children's home in the U.S. By 1994, I had finished college and gotten married. Jonathan and I were both in graduate school, and I was also working full-time as a medical

technologist at a hospital. I put my graduate studies on hold and quit my job to accompany Jonathan to the Philippines, where he conducted a research project for his Ph.D. During our year in the Philippines, God provided unexpected connections with visiting scholars from Vietnam who helped us arrange a trip so we could reconnect with my mother and older brother and his family!

The year 1994 was also an exciting time to be in Vietnam! Held back and

oppressed by wars, the hardworking Vietnamese people were ready to let go of the past so they could make progress and improve their economic situation for their children's futures. We were in Vietnam when the U.S. officially lifted the trade embargo against Vietnam. Coca Cola was ready and immediately unveiled big signs on billboards saying: "Rất vui mừng gặp lại bạn!" "So happy to see you again, friend!"

The words "eager anticipation" are not strong enough to describe the way I felt about my first trip back to Vietnam. Thoughts of the day our father was taken away by the North Vietnamese and our home was reduced to ruins by gunfire and shrapnel came to mind. My father was a Christian, and through his pastoral involvement in humanitarian work with the U.S. military, we were flown

to Saigon, away from the fighting front. I still remember the scary ride on a military helicopter with double propellers (a twin-engine Boeing CH-47 Chinook). Forced to scatter and seek refuge in safer places, my younger brother and I were sent to live at an orphanage that had recently been established by the men and women of the Protestant Chapel at the U.S. Airbase at Cam Ranh. I was five and my little brother, Binh, was just two years old. My older sister took us to the orphanage and stayed with us for a few days. Then she left us one day without letting us know of her plan. I was devastated, especially when I later learned that she had died sometime after she went back to her job in Saigon. I forever regret that I didn't have the chance to know my older sister. And during all the years since the day of our family's separation, I had longed to see my mother—to learn more about my parents and my family background.

Our long-awaited reunion was an indescribable experience!



1994 author's first VN family picture



Helping family with rambutan harvest

We invested in a video camera (which was very expensive at the time) to record everything for us and for my younger brother who couldn't join us. We found my mother and older brother, Anh Lang, and his family living in very difficult conditions in the countryside. Not being accustomed to sleeping on a hard board, my tailbone began to hurt. So, we bought a simple cushioned mattress to help alleviate my pain. Mother appreciated the small gifts we brought, as well as the mattress, which we left behind for her to enjoy.

While we were there, Anh Lang shared the idea that we might buy some fruit-producing land to help provide them with a livelihood. We were eager to bless the family to the best of our ability because, as American citizens, God had abundantly blessed us over the years. However, my brother's request seemed like an impossible feat since we were graduate students with "negative income" at that time.

Consequently, we went back to the Philippines without promising him anything.

Then, after we got back to the Philippines, on a bus ride to Manila, our expensive video camera was stolen, along with the tapes containing all the priceless, precious memories of our first trip back to Vietnam, the land of my birth. The videos of our long-awaited reunion were gone, along with special messages for my younger brother that he would never get to see! Having all the recorded memories taken from us felt like having the connection with my mother cruelly snatched away from me...again!

For days I was inconsolable, and it often felt like our trip back and my reconnection with my mother was just a dream. I felt that the only way I could move forward was to go to Vietnam again. I needed to make sure the connection with my family was real. Jonathan never allowed me to travel alone, but this time he yielded. I was afraid of traveling alone, especially traveling to a very poor, control-intensive country that, at that time, had many censorship procedures and restrictions in place. But the yearning to see my mother again provided the strength and courage to push me forward with the plan. At the same time, God also provided a way for us to get a large portion of our meager savings from the States so I could take the



Family picture with the author's two brothers and mom

money with me to Vietnam to use for whatever God would guide us to do.

While I was there on the second visit, I used the money to purchase the use of one hectare (2.5 acres) of land, which came with a rudimentary shack for shelter and fully grown fruit trees (rambutan) for my family to use for their livelihood. The payment transactions were quite interesting: first, we had to convert the USD into Vietnamese Dong (VND) and then use the VND to buy rings of gold to use for buying the use of the land (land cannot be owned individually in a communist country). There were losses in the transactions, but fortunately, the dollar was highly valued then. The family was so grateful to have their own shelter and a means to improve their livelihood. Besides the fruit trees, my brother's family was able to raise pigs and chickens and make home-made noodles to sell for additional income. I was overjoyed that we could contribute to my mother's

care and bless Anh Lang and his family this way. God instructed His chosen people in Deuteronomy 5:16 to *"Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you."* God's instructions remain relevant for us today. We love and honor our parents by looking after them while they are alive and not by setting up fancy altars to worship them, as is done in ancestor worship. Only the One true God who created the universe and everything in it is worthy of our worship.

Over the years, the thatched roof and mud shack on the land gave way to a better structure of cement siding and a tin roof. A large living room area with a beautifully tiled floor was added and used as a registered place of worship for the Christian community in the area. In 2016, along with some gifts from gracious friends and family members, we renovated the structure and added a large, covered veranda which provided better shelter for those



LoiBeth and her mother



Newly built church 2023

who came to worship, protecting them and their motorcycles from the heavy monsoon rains. In recent years, my niece and nephews also built homes for themselves and their families on the property. Then, this past May 2023, in just around 40 days, a beautiful little church was constructed on the land—a building dedicated to the worship of our Lord.

From our initial visit to Vietnam to the present, God has done amazing things to transform and bless my family and grow their faith in Him. Through the little church, God has provided access to spiritual food for the people in a rural town—a place that has seen continuous improvement in living standards and has received favor with the communist town officials who have been supportive of Christian activities, acknowledging that a place to worship God is far more beneficial for a community than a bar.

Over the years, Vietnamese brothers and sisters and a few close friends and family members from the U.S. have contributed to the upkeep of God's sanctuary and God's work of reaching the community there. We recognize that God blesses us with gifts and resources to be used not only for our own needs but to bless others as well. We praise God and thank Him for allowing us to be a part of His work in blessing my family and the small Christian community in Vietnam.

Looking back over the last 30 years, we realize this whole process has been a testimony to the fact that God uses everything for His glory. If our video camera and the tapes of our precious memories hadn't been stolen, I probably would not have returned to Vietnam. We would not have bought the piece of land, and we would have missed the opportunity to witness the wonderful way God has taken care of my mother and Anh Lang and his family through all these years, and the way God continues to bless His people and bring glory to Himself through the little church located on the land we bought in 1994 during my second, unplanned, painfully-prompted trip to Vietnam.

“All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies” (Psalm 25:10). ■



LoiBeth King and her husband have served with an established mission organization in East Asia for 26 years. From their student days in the Philippines, their focus has been to share the Good News of Christ with others so they too could be redeemed by God and transformed for the better. For them, serving God overseas has been an amazing adventure!



A Timely Stranger

by Tom Buttram

Most businesses have upturns and downturns, but I know for sure that the used car business is a lot like bronc riding. The ups and downs make your head swim, and when you hit bottom, it's like you land on your back after sailing through the air for two or three minutes. Once following such a landing, I walked down a country road late at night to have a talk with the only One with answers. Not knowing what direction to turn and seeing no path to follow,

I cried out, "Why, God, if you are in the lead, am I losing so much money with no end in sight?"

It was in the early 1990s and the Persian Gulf War was in full swing. People went home from work to eat, turn on the television, and then watch the footage of the war. It was a new phenomenon that we hadn't seen before, and it was spelling doom for little dealers like me. No one was interested in buying a car! My

discouragement was evident—I was sure—to my employees, customers, and all who were around me. I didn't have enough money to last another month.

I usually closed out my books late at night when my family was in bed and no one was at the office to disturb my work. This particular night, I was in my office with the door closed and curtains pulled, posting another month's miserable figures, when about midnight, there was a knock at the door. Thinking it was a policeman checking on my "lights on," I went to the door to see an older woman who had something on her mind. "Yes, how can I help you?" I asked. "I need a brake job," she said. In a "I can't believe my ears" tone, I replied, "Ma'am, we're not a garage, we're a used car lot, and we only work on our own cars. Besides—IT'S MIDNIGHT! My mechanic is at his house sleeping with his family, the parts store has been closed for hours, so there's nothing I can do for you. If

you come back in the morning, I'll try to get you some help."

"I know you can help me, and I need your help tonight," she urged. Seeking to put an end to her persistence, I invited her into our utility room where we keep a few parts. "See, here in this cabinet, "Ma'am. We keep a few parts that have inventory numbers, but I don't know what they fit." I picked up a box of brake pads to show her. On that particular box, my mechanic had written, "76-80 FORD PINTO." At this point, I was red-faced, as her car was a '79 Pinto. Having worked myself into a corner, I said, "OK, pull your car in and I'll install these for you." The installation went quickly, and after a test drive, I told her that I would only charge her \$29 for the parts and call the labor free!

"Oh," she said, "I don't have any money, but I do have a word for you. There's a purpose in your being here—this is where you need to be.



Tom with Taylorcraft

This community benefits from the work you do, and I want to thank you for helping me.” And with that, she walked out of my shop.

Later that evening, I began to muse over the words of this woman whom I had never seen before. They were full of clarity and meaning, and they encouraged me. I had asked God for an answer—not an intuition or some whimsical feeling that could be overturned with another bad deal. I needed an in-your-face, never-question-it-again answer that I couldn’t blow off. That night I got it! As a result of the stranger’s words, I found new confidence in my approach to selling, my inventory increased, and the figures returned to the black.

Who was this person who came to my shop at midnight? A messenger, certainly, and maybe even an angel. Her message was definitely an answer to the prayer I had delivered to the Lord in tears.

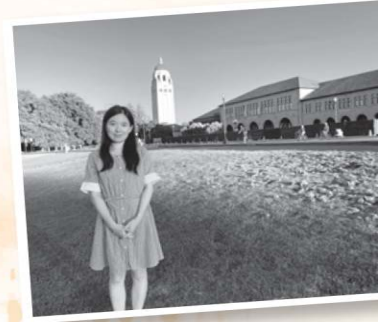
May we all have eyes to see the many ways God is at work in our lives. ■



Tom Buttram is a retired teacher, businessman, and missionary. He continues to witness, preach, and print

gospel tracts. Receive a free sample tract from tombuttram@gmail.com.

(Continued from back cover)



Stanford University

barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:26).

Ants get inspiration and wisdom from the God who created them. *“The ants have no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (Proverbs 6:6–8).* We have all watched neatly lined ants, working together to carry small breadcrumbs up the steps. They work together as a well-equipped team. Even if halfway up and the breadcrumbs fall, they are not discouraged. They finally succeed in reaching the top. Not only working together to hoard food, the tiny ants also build “roads,” such as those in the Amazon rainforest. They often dig grooves in tree trunks to escape storms or use gravel on flat ground as pathways. They can “design” a roundabout-like overpass, even designing and building a variety of nests, with reasoned internal layout, smooth air, constant temperature, and various facilities. Hundreds of anthills can be connected, tens of meters long.



Rainbow

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Some are like “skyscrapers” rising from the ground, up to 6 meters high, equivalent to a 300-story skyscraper for humans.

The soaring eagle rises and spreads its wings in the headwind. The small spider weaves its web that is then blown by the wind, but with motivation, it begins weaving again and again.

Staying close to nature helps us experience God as a creative inventor and artist. He uses the sky and the earth as canvases, decorating the clouds with pink and orange glow. Trees that have countless leaves have no two that are identical. Plants that grow along the roadside are not fertilized by a gardener, yet they flourish.

God’s creation has established laws. Under photosynthesis, with the help of solar energy, plants convert carbon dioxide and water into carbohydrates as nutrients for their own growth, while releasing oxygen and water to nourish all living things and the

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environment in which they live. It is a perfect cycle, and God’s wonderful work can be seen, even if we can’t understand the mystery.

God makes rivers in the desert and opens paths through the wilderness. His omnipotence and all-encompassing love can be experienced in nature. If we are bored, we can go to the sea and feel the peace it brings. God reminds us to rest, because “... *in repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength*” (Isaiah 30:15). If in our ambition, we feel we’ve lost control of our life, we can look up at the stars and realize our own finitude and insignificance. God tells us not to be complacent since “*the grass withers and flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass*” (Isaiah 40:7). If we are depressed or disappointed, we can look at the rainbow in the sky after the rain. It is the sign of God’s covenant with Noah after the Great Flood. It confirms God’s faithfulness to all mankind.



Whether it is a tree that takes deep roots downward, or the diligent ant that never gives up, or lush forests, babbling streams, and smooth stones—nature can soothe our hearts and bring about an inexplicable sense of God’s steadfast love. Every day, through blooming flowers and singing birds, nature tells us that life is the best gift, and living every day without regrets is the greatest happiness. So, let us not be blind to the beauty of heaven and earth and miss out on God’s message of love and grace that it has for us. God’s glory and power can be seen through nature, *“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands”* (Psalm 19:1).

God has left breathtaking beauty in every corner of the world we live in, as the sculptor Rodin said, *“The world doesn’t lack beauty, but it lacks the eyes to discover it.”* Let us turn our eyes heavenward to see God’s beauty in nature and to experience His love! ■



Cindy Yang is a stay-at-home mom and freelance Christian writer. She is also a member of the news broadcasting ministry

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Nature Speaks of God

by Cindy Yang

We walk along a forest path with warm sunlight spilling between the trees and hear the chirping of birds and insects. We feel the turning of the seasons. Silently and tranquilly, everything changes in the wonderful and powerful hands of God. Green leaves turn to red one season and white snow covers the ground in another. Pleasant rains water the thirsty earth.

Both Christian and atheist experience the goodness of God through nature. *"He causes his sun to rise on the good and the evil and sends rain to the righteous as well as to the unrighteous"* (Matthew 5:45).

Carefree squirrels jumping along the ground and sparrows resting on tall poles live peaceful lives. *"...look at the birds of the air, they neither sow nor reap nor store away in*

