

OUT OF THE DARKNESS INTO THE LIGHT

Testimony of Susan J. Decuir

Spiraling downward through a tunnel at the speed of light where there was no light, I cried out to God - grasping, hoping, praying there was a God as darkness pulled me into its inky depths, gripping me with a terror I'd never known. With what little optimism I had left, I determined; *if I wake up tomorrow and I'm not in Hell, I have to find out if there is a God.*

A blazing Texas sunrise filtered through the curtains, waking me abruptly, my head pounding. I forced myself to get up then slowly edged my way to the kitchen to start a pot of strong coffee. The odor of dry vomit on my hair sickened me, a grim reminder of the escapades that had led to the terrifying near death experience. I pulled my waist-length brunette mane into a ponytail. *I'll shower as soon as I medicate myself with coffee,* I thought, thankful to be alive and not in Hell.

I downed a cup of strong coffee then stepped into the steamy shower. Soothing water covered me outside; shame flowed through my insides. Though I scrubbed vigorously, dusted myself with floral scented bath powder and drenched myself with perfume - I still felt dirty.

Divorced at age twenty-seven after nearly ten years of marriage, I struggled to make ends meet for my son, Mark, and me. I spent five and a half years in rebellion, bitter over my failed marriage, going from one boyfriend to another, looking for love until I found a man who wanted to marry me. I began having second thoughts about marrying him. His four children and his mom and dad lived with him. My son didn't get along with any of them. Then I learned his mom would decide the carpet color, etc. in the home we were buying. What was I thinking? I had the diamond ring examined by a jeweler, and as I suspected, it was as fake as the relationship.

The morning before the dark tunnel experience, I went to visit my son's new friend's mom at their apartment a few buildings down from ours. The boys were happily playing so she invited me in then offered me a beer. I accepted it, then another and another. We drank, talked and whined about how terrible our lives were, especially after our divorces. Draining every can of beer, we headed to the liquor store for more. I stumbled home late that afternoon ready to call my fiancé to break off the engagement when my older brother called, inviting me to a party at his home. He'd never invited me to a party before and I was in the party mood, so I said I would come. Then my fiancé called. I asked him to take me, though I didn't really want to be with him, yet I was too drunk to care.

Before leaving my apartment my fiancé lit a marijuana joint, took a puff then passed it to me. Sufficiently stoned, we left for the party. After a few drinks I got up to dance, become dizzy and passed out. With my head hanging out the car window, I vomited all the way home. Forgetting I'd told Mark he could spend the night with his friend, we went to pick him up. Not understanding what was wrong with his mom, he protested all the way home. My fiancé dumped me into my bed and left me. Could I blame him? The room began to spin, along with my head, when I spun out of control into the dark tunnel. My son came into my room, suitcase in hand, threatening to run away. Who could blame him? By the grace of God I somehow managed to convince him to stay home.

That morning, I looked in on Mark, still asleep in his room, started the coffee then crashed on the sofa and made a mental list of every person who had ever talked to me about God, and wondered, *How has my life come to this?*

Mom and Dad had raised me with the knowledge of God, had taken my brothers and me to Vacation Bible School and to church, especially Christmas and Easter. I remember feeling so pure, so special, playing an angel one year and Mary, the mother of Jesus, another year in the Christmas play. Mom was sure to have the TV tuned to Billy Graham whenever a crusade was aired and we didn't dare change the channel. But somehow Jesus got lost among Santa Claus, The Easter Bunny, the tooth fairy, etc.

Two Christian aunts had recently barraged me with letters. "It's better to be born twice and die once than to be born once and die twice," Aunt Hilda wrote. *What does that mean?* I pondered. Aunt Winnie wrote, "There are some pastors who are getting born-again." *How could that be?* I questioned. *Wouldn't a pastor be born again?* Tucked inside each letter was a Bible tract. Afraid to throw away something with words from the Bible - I stuffed them in a drawer.

I called the pastor of the church I had attended before the divorce. He was confident that all my problems had been taken care of when he'd baptized me seven years earlier. He didn't have a clue! *Maybe he's one of those pastors my aunt wrote about who wasn't born again.*

One evening my younger brother, Doug, dropped by (something he'd never done before). Doug, also divorced, never went to the clubs or bars like I did, so I was surprised to see the cute girl with him. "How did you two meet?" I asked.

"At work," he answered, matter-of-factly.

"Come on in," I motioned, juggling my wine in one hand, my cigarette in the other. They declined my drink offer, sat across the room from me and listened as I poured out of heart, lamenting about my miserable existence. "Sister Sue. I learned a long time ago that the Bible has the answers to life's questions." Doug had my attention. *That's what I'll do, I determined. I'll read the Bible.*

When they left I searched every drawer till I found my yellowed childhood Bible with my maiden name engraved in gold letters on front. Sensing the love my parents had put into that gift I ignored for too many years brought tears. I flipped through the pages, but that ancient book was still beyond my understanding.

Impulsively, or moved upon by some unknown force, I called my old friend Ron from my previous job. After working together for a year, Ron knew me well. We bummed cigarettes off each other, talked about our relationships (he broke off several engagements in the short time we worked together) our divorces and our search for meaning to life. Ron noticed my books, *Life after Death* and *My Mother Myself*, sitting on my desk. "Here, try these." Ron handed me several New Age and Esoteric books. "This is what I've been reading." They went way over my head, leaving me more confused. But one day Ron left his clever drawing of the Garden of Eden in my typewriter. Below colorful fruit trees, flowers, birds and a cloud filled blue sky Ron wrote, "In the beginning God created Adam and Eve; and everything they touched turned to s..t." I related to his interpretation. (I still have that drawing.)

Ron seemed happy to hear from me, especially when I mentioned what my brother said about the Bible. "I've been reading the Bible a lot lately," he said. *Ron seems different, kind of peaceful*, I thought. Spontaneously, I asked, "I was wondering. Well.

Would you go to church with me Sunday? I have this aunt who keeps telling me about a church she wants me to visit. "He said yes, and I looked forward to that Sunday like I'd never looked forward to a Sunday before.

After work the next day, I parked my blue VW beetle in front of my apartment, dreading another long, lonely boring night of television when I noticed Ron sitting on the steps. My face lit up, or did I blush? "Come on in. I'll make dinner." After a simple meal of bacon and scrambled eggs, Mark went out to play and Ron and I sat crossed legged on the living room floor. *He looks good with his new beard, and he sure has pretty blue eyes*, I thought, then noticed the Bible, the book that had been a mystery to me for thirty-two years.

Ron ruffled the gold edged pages. "Would you like to have a Bible study?"

"Sure. Sounds good to me," I agreed.

"Where would you like to start?"

I shrugged my shoulders, not having a clue.

"Then let's start with the gospels."

"What are the gospels?" I felt stupid asking; yet Ron didn't make me feel stupid. "Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They tell about the life, ministry, crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Jesus." I was especially impressed when I learned the words in red were the very "words" of Jesus.

I listened intently, desperately needing something to ease the pain, the guilt - the sin, intermittently barraging Ron with never-ending questions. When I asked a question, he turned to the very page in that colossal book that had the answer. *How does he do that?* I wondered. I didn't know anyone could do that.

Sunday we visited the church my aunt told me about. For two weeks Ron and his Bible waited on the steps for me after work. Ron, keenly aware of my sins, lovingly, gently (like the Lord Himself) turned to the red, black and white pages that listed my sins, and read them. The truth pierced my heart, yet I wasn't offended. I was seeking and desperately wanted peace. Ron said something to me that I never remembering hearing before. "You know how when you pray, you pray in Jesus name?"

"Why is that?" I asked.

He showed me John 14:6. "Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life: no man comes unto the Father, but by me," and verse 13, "And whatsoever you ask in my name I will do it."

I couldn't wait to say my prayers that night, like I'd been taught as a child. I climbed into bed, pulled the sheet under my chin and looked toward the ceiling. I'm not sure what I prayed, but I remember closing with, "God, I don't understand why I need to say this, but, in Jesus name I pray." I felt power in that prayer like I'd never experienced. Something changed. The words in that ancient book became alive, and the truth of the Gospel message pierced my heart. When Ron read Mark 11:25 & 26, "And when you stand praying, forgive, if you have unforgiveness against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses," I knew my sins were great. Desperately I needed - wanted - forgiveness. It was time to quit blaming others for my messed up my life and take the responsibility.

I now realize it was the Holy Spirit that lead me to call my ex-husband and invite him to meet me at my apartment on my lunch hour. I wasn't sure if he would since he had

remarried, but he did. We sat across the room from each other, talked for a while then I looked into his eyes and asked, "Will you forgive me for the things I did in wrong in our marriage?" He did. "I also want to forgive you for the things that you did wrong." He nodded in agreement, we parted and that was that.

Forgiveness took me one giant step closer to God. While typing a letter at work the following day, the number six kept coming up in the address of the letter. I flashed back to age sixteen, sitting in my boyfriend's (later my first husband) parent's den. His parents read Revelation chapter 13 to me. I remembered it was about a time in the future when the Antichrist would require everyone to take a number in their right hand or forehead, the Mark of the Beast, 666, in order to buy or sell. Suddenly, I freaked; messed up the letter, started it over and froze every time I typed the number six.

That's when I experienced the awesome, undeniable all-powerful presence of God for the first time in my life. I jumped up and grabbed my purse; frantically searching for the New Testament Bible I'd recently put there. Finding it, I ran to the ladies-room and locked myself in a stall. I turned to the back of my Bible where I knew I'd find Revelation chapter 13. One of the few things I knew about the Bible was that Revelation is the last book in the Bible and Genesis is the first. I was shocked to find Proverbs the last book in my Bible. Turning back several pages, I found Psalms. *Where is Revelation? And why does Psalms start with page one?* I panicked. I remembered the last thing Ron said at our Bible study was, "From now on we'll study Psalms and Proverbs." *Has God changed the pages on my Bible?* I turned back the pages till I found Revelation, ending with page 500. Trembling, certain the floor and then the earth would open and tumble me in the flames of hell - I thought the rapture had happened. My aunt's had written about the rapture many times in their letters. My sinful life flashed before me in an instant. *Did Jesus come and I missed it?* 1 Thessalonians 4: 16 & 17 "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

I unlocked the stall, ran to my desk where two girls I worked with waited for me. "Susan. What's wrong? You look like death." I now know that I was dying, dying to self, to the old man of sin that I had lived with for thirty-two years. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth, we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is free from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." Romans 6:6-8

"I'm sick. I need to go home." I mumbled, but first called Ron at work, certain he could tell me why God changed the pages in my Bible. A co-worker answered the phone. "I don't know where Ron is. He was here a minute ago. He just disappeared." Fear and trembling barely describes how I felt, certain Ron had gone in the rapture, or perhaps he'd been an angel.

I ran past the receptionist. "I'm sick. I have to go home. Please tell my boss." I hopped into my blue VW, headed toward home and was comforted by beautiful, heavenly singing - coming from me - singing Amazing Grace. It had to be supernatural, because I never could sing.

I burst into my apartment, picked up my childhood Bible and flipped the pages to the back, relieved to find Revelation the last book, yet confused. The phone rang. "Susan, are you okay?" Hearing Ron's voice gave me some relief.

"No. God changed the pages in one of my Bibles. I don't know what's happening," not aware that the Gideon's commonly include Psalms and Proverbs from the Old Testament after Revelation in their New Testament Bibles.

"Do you want me to come over?"

"Yes," I pleaded, tears spilling onto the yellowed pages of my Bible.

Ron attempted to console me, but I had no peace. "Are you ready to go back to work?" he asked. "NO! I can't."

"Let's go for a ride in the country." Ron opened the door and helped me climb into his hippie style VW van. It felt good to get out of the city. Sporadically, Ron honked at cars passing us on the two-lane country road. Sometimes he'd receive a honk in return. My thoughts flashed back to the mid-seventies when I saw "Honk if you love Jesus" bumper stickers everywhere. A few honked in return; most didn't. A great sadness filled me, as I believe the Lord revealed to me that many people didn't love him. Did I? I didn't tell Ron what was happening. He just kept driving, honking and talking.

Then, whether from inside of me or from the heavens, whether audible or inaudible, I do not know, but I knew then as I know now that it was the voice of Jesus. In the most gentle, loving yet powerful voice I clearly heard him ask, "Will you marry me?" *You don't want to marry me. I'm unclean. You don't know the awful things I've done*, I argued. (But of course, He did.) *Why would He want me?* I continued telling Him how unworthy I was, never realizing that I was confessing my sins. Again, I heard, "Will you marry me? I love you." 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." As I continued telling my sins to the Lord, the trees became greener, the sky brighter and bluer, like putting on a new pair of glasses - only better. I felt lighter, cleaner - even peaceful. I wasn't sure what was happening to me. I still didn't say anything to Ron about what was happening. Though I heard Ron talking to me, I was in another dimension - the place where Jesus lives. A heavenly realm.

"Are you thirsty, Susan?" Ron asked, bringing me back to earth.

"Yes, very."

I waited in the van while Ron went into the convenience store. He came back with two bottles of apple juice and handed me one. Thirstily, I drank the sweetest apple juice I'd ever tasted. All of my senses had become alive, not like the drug-induced intensified senses I'd experienced from marijuana. This was something pure. Good.

Gazing into a glorious clear blue sky that perfect October 24, 1979 day, I saw two white objects floating into the heavens. "Did you see that?" I pointed. Ron turned and looked, "What?" he asked.

"The angels." But already they were gone. To this day I believe I watched my ministering angels depart back into the heavens, because that day - I was born again, forever changed through God's love and forgiveness. "Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3 I was translated out of the kingdom of darkness into God's glorious kingdom of light. Colossians 1:13 "Who has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of His dear Son."

It was then that I understood the change in Ron. He too had found the meaning of life through Jesus.

We headed for home and Ron waited with me for Mark to get home from school. Ron took us out for pizza, the most delicious pizza I'd ever eaten. That night I slept as peacefully as I did when I was a child.

I got up and went to work as normal the following day, yet nothing was normal in the way I had known for thirty-two years. Though I'd been consuming nearly two packs of cigarettes a day, the desire to smoke was gone. The desire for alcohol and marijuana left. The thought of any of it repulsed me. My thoughts had changed. The words that came out of my mouth were sweeter. No curse words could come out.

One of the girls who saw me before I fled from work the previous day and I were talking when suddenly she asked, "What happened to you? You seem different." Believe me, she got an earful. She was the very first person I witnessed to about Jesus, certain she too would repent, call out to Jesus and be saved. I found out it wasn't that easy, but the Lord put the desire for evangelism in me and I haven't stopped sharing yet. And those Bible tracts my aunts used to tuck into their letters - I give them out everywhere I go.

Ron must have decided I was worth keeping, when a few days later he proposed. I said yes, and three weeks later, on the most beautiful November Saturday morning of my life we were married, and we never did have a "real" date other than going to church together.

About a week before Ron proposed, my son told me, "Mom, you should marry him." Out of the mouth of babes.

Several weeks later I was at work when the man I'd been engaged to called. The first time I'd heard from him since my near death experience. I had completely forgotten about him. "I'm married. Jesus totally changed my life and I was born again," I said. He was speechless. I later wrapped the ring into a tissue, stuffed into an envelope and mailed it to him. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." 11 Corinthians 5:17

About a year after we were married, Ron and I were in church when the pastor taught on The Bride of Christ from Revelation 21:9. "And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will show thee the bride, the Lamb's wife." I never knew that was in the Bible. I never even told Ron about Jesus proposing to me. I thought he might think I was crazy. Well, turns out we're both peculiar people. Titus 2:14 "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." I now feel clean inside and out. I have hope, I am forgiven, I have peace and I have assurance of eternal life. Hallelujah!

Jesus is the spotless lamb who was slain for our sins. It is the blood of Jesus that covers the sins of all who will believe. And now I know that I can call on Jesus in prayer at any time, anywhere.

THE END

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