

# **LAMENTS**

## **EDITED BY KIM BOND**

This anthology is dedicated to our Lord.

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# **Love Is a Bridge**

**By Sandra L Hickman**

From lamenting to joy, the love of God will bridge even the widest gap of fear and dread. Many have faced monumental hardships to save their children. It was our personal experience that only fierce motherly love could navigate this heart-torn emotional journey. But when the jagged edges of your frayed and torn emotions are just too much to bear God steps in and that's when you surrender it all. You know that this is a God-sized problem and His shoulders are much bigger than yours! He sees your lamentations. He feels them as strongly as you do. His big heart is breaking at the sound of your one-small-heart

splitting in two. Only the supreme Being who is God can turn your heartbreak and lamenting into pure joy. This is about my grandson Jordan whose life has been a journey of lamentations, love and miracles. How his life was saved by God who then handed the baton to his mother Tari, my daughter who continues to be his fierce and unrelenting Mama-bear, and to me Jordan's grandmother, his fierce Nanna-bear. By His perfect Spirit, God has lead us through it all . . . The watchful eye of the Father and the saving grace of the Son have been, and still are ever present in Jordan's life. In truth we are the caretakers of this amazing young life which God entrusted to us.

God's love is the greatest love of all. It's through His love that you really find the enormity of the beautiful passion and

meaning of Divine Love. The following account describing that love, is based on my poem entitled "Love Is..."

Love Is . . . "It's when you can love a tiny life this much, and still manage to breathe!"

That's how it was when he was born. He came into this world dead... flatlined. Emotions were running, both good and bad. Good that he was alive, bad that his life was in so much peril. Loving him hurt so much. Resenting the doctor so much hurt.... everything hurt! He was eventually revived. Watching him struggle to live hurt. But he did live! I thanked God with a depth of thankfulness I could never have imagined. The kind that comes from a place so deep and desperate like the passing through the

valley in the shadow of death, and coming out the other side.

He was here, yet he was lost to us. On the eighth day he turned a corner and came back. I don't know where he went, but I know God was there! I think God took him for a purpose, a Jeremiah 29:11 purpose ... and then gave him back. I can't imagine a world without him, I cannot think of him being just a memory. Someone who was only there in my faded past. A painful memory which could never have stopped. I can't imagine being unable to fully remember his beautiful little face, or searching my mind for the memories of his features. The big darkest brown eyes. The black picture perfect "painted on" sculptured eyebrows which captivated everyone! The soft cherubic cheeks and the darling little

mouth which, if could have spoken, would have told us unimaginable things which had been seen in the valley of the shadow - and in the cascading light of heaven.

He had come into this world like a Tsunami sweeping away all our hopes and dreams. Everything felt lost. Everything changed. Bad dreams are only supposed to happen in your sleep, but this nightmare hit us when our eyes were wide open. It was too much to bear. I searched my mind for reasons, to shed some light... but it was dark in there. There was nowhere to hide, I wanted to but I couldn't. Tears became both a constant friend of release, and my worst enemy of bitterness.

They needed me! He needed me!  
So... numb and broken I got off my knees and I carried on. These young parents, my

daughter and her partner thrust into parenthood in the most aggressive way. Would lamenting or loving prevail? I wanted to wallow. I remember hiding in my walk-in wardrobe and crashing to the floor, beating the air like a blind boxer. For a moment it felt good, but it wasn't an option to stay there. To press on was the only option even when the pressure was an engulfment of dark scenery.

Then, as God is want to do, He changes the scene ..... Light came! Pushing back the darkness. Prayers prevailed. Ha! Petitions went out and across the nation people prayed. God heard and HE came! And along with God, forgiveness came. The doctor and his monumental errors... forgiveness was ongoing. Spastic Cerebral Palsy was the legacy which rocked every

notion or thought we could ever have imagined. Yes, it was unimaginable. Yet joy was ever present in the form a tiny little boy. The battle was long and arduous. Often-times it still is. But the candescent joy remains, a strong and constant reminder of a living loving God.

The years have travelled by. I sat in my car watching him as he walked away one day and the word "spectacular" came! With his faltering gait and semi clenched fists, beautiful olive brown skin, his muscular arms and tousled black hair... so handsome. He is spectacular! He is a young man now. God has been good. The life he was given has brought him into his future. Although it wasn't the life we asked for, we have been touched, changed and made

better for it. Better because his being here brings hope, and the candescent joy.

He is Jordan... beloved of the Lord. His journey is not over yet, it's still just beginning! The unfolding of the awesome plan of God!

"..... It's when you can love Jesus this much and still breathe!"

## **Ode to Tears**

**by Molly woundresser**

Even now my witness is in heaven;

my advocate is on high.

My intercessor is my friend

as my eyes pour out tears to God;

Job 16: 19-20 NIV

I used to dread and often sigh

At eyes that never would stay dry!

My friends would say, eyes rolled to sky,

"There she goes... she's going to cry!"

What can you do with a pair of eyes,

That lose control and by 'n by...

Spill their banks and flood the face

'Til there is not a single trace,

Of sweet composure's quiet grace,

Aw no, it all has been erased,

By puffy eyes and salty flows  
And everyone says, "There she goes!"  
"Yes," they exclaim with sad dismay,  
"She cannot help her wet display!"  
But shall I tell you what I've learned,  
And why these tears just won't be spurned?  
Inside this heart a "well" was placed  
By Sovereign hand of Love and Grace;  
And filled with precious liquid gold  
That flows whenever it is told...  
By quiet Voice from inner place  
To flood the heart and fill the face...  
With tears! Ah yes, the world should know  
That tears are not just born of woes;  
Sometimes our tears mean softer things;  
Sometimes our tears can laughter bring...  
And, love! And, hope! And, tender word.  
(I know it sounds a bit absurd...)  
That salty mess is a Sovereign gift,

To others touch, and spirits lift!  
But, there it is, my story's true,  
And all this "weepy-one" can do...  
Is be exactly who she is,  
And if her tears do Kingdom's biz?  
Then tears are HIS, for earthly race;  
With drippy nose and puffy face!  
So pass those tissues! Don't be shy!  
For Heaven smiles... on watery eyes.

## **Bittersweet**

**By J. Ross Archer**

“How long have we been waiting, John?”

“I’m not sure, but I think at least an hour, maybe more. How are you holding up, Babe?”

“I cannot hold any part of my body still; it’s like it has a mind of its own. The pain is getting worse, too. Can I have another pain pill yet?”

She was pounding her thighs with her fists and rocking in place; I was at a loss as to what to do to help her.

“Not yet—another half hour, sweetheart. Hang on.”

Joan stood, shakily; her body movements resembled that of an out of control robot—jerky and exaggerated.

“Damit, stop staring at me,” she shouted to everyone in particular.

I could feel my ears turning red from embarrassment. The waiting room was full, and the doctor was running behind. Joan and I were nervous enough about what we might find out without this extra waiting time. She was beginning to hit bottom physically, and she had taken all the medicine she could have for now. Her dystonia (uncontrolled body movements) was growing worse. Two neurologists found Joan free of any disease—nothing wrong with her, none-the-less she was still having severe body pain and uncontrollable body limb movements. Most frightening, she was

acting strangely and doing weird things, unlike her normal self. I said another silent prayer and tried to read again, but I read the same paragraph over and over.

“Mrs. Archer, the doctor will see you now, this way please.”

Thank God, I said under my breath. The nurse held the door open and waited. Joan had difficulty walking; her gait was hesitant; she took short steps and paused in-between steps momentarily. The dipphasia (freezing in place) is almost debilitating. The nurse pretended not to notice and got us seated in an examination room.

“The doctor will be in momentarily.”

Joan jumped up and started shuffling around the room in concentric circles. She moaned as she shuffled;

slobber dripped from curled lips. I wiped her lips and attempted to get her in the chair, but she fought me until we both fell on the floor, unharmed but exasperated and tired.

Another wait began. I did not know if Joan can take much more waiting; she had become more agitated. She was getting out of control. I was getting more anxious every minute, but maybe it was not showing. However, I was sweating profusely, and I knew that it was showing.

Knock, knock. “Sorry to keep you folks waiting; two emergencies popped up—I never know. I’m your doctor.”

She looked exactly like an upper-class store window mannequin dressed in the latest fashion of women’s clothing; not a hair was out of place. Her jewelry appeared tasteful and expensive. She stood ramrod

straight, and she looked at Joan with an unblinking icy stare.

“Mrs. Archer, I have examined your tests, your file, x-rays, labs, and scans thoroughly, and I can find nothing functionally wrong with you. I think your problem might be psychologically rooted; I am going to refer you to our mental evaluation department. The nurse will make an appointment for you and will call you to let you know when to be there. Any questions?”

“No, doctor, if I had any I do not think you would know the answers.”

Joan was fuming inside. Her fists were clenched, her eyes were mere slits, and her entire body trembled. Her mouth moved, but nothing came out for a few seconds. I knew immediately that she had

reached her breaking point. Long day—bad news. I rose from my chair, stood beside her. In a low venom-filled voice, Joan unloaded on the doctor. Joan had lost control; a dam of pent up emotions and frustrations broke loose. Tears flowed, her voice raised several decibels, and she stood in defiance of the doctor's lack of explanation.

“Can’t you see my tremors? Don’t you see that I walk like a drunk? I stay mentally confused and agitated, and I want to know why you cannot see these things and admit that I am sick. I want to know what is wrong with me. Doctor, why will you not tell me?”

The doctor said nothing in response to Joan’s outburst; she remained staring

stoically. Her face flushed and her right eye twitched, but she remained unflappable.

This doctor was head of the neurological department of a major teaching hospital associated with a leading university. I could understand Joan's anger and disappointment, and I shared it, but I also knew fighting with this doctor would come to no good end. I escorted Joan from the examination room offering a vague apology to the doctor.

I did not want to contribute to an inflammatory situation. The doctor had been cold, direct, and seemed uncaring. Besides, it did not matter; the visit did not accomplish what we hoped for—some answers.

###

We were quiet during the hour and a half ride home saying little. Joan was still crying, and I was racking my brain for answers.

“That was the third so-called expert doctor to say nothing is wrong with me; that it is all in my head. I’m a hypochondriac, I guess. What are we going to do, John? I cannot go on like this. I grow worse every day. I feel as though I’m slowly drifting away from you and everyone else.”

“I know, sweetheart, but we will get to the bottom of your illness, whatever it is, and soon. We are driving over to Fitzgerald to see a specialist. Perhaps he will give us a reliable referral.”

###

The specialist examined Joan and concluded that she might have Parkinson's Disease. He referred her to a neurologist who specializes in Parkinson's, and a visit to him confirmed the doctor's suspicion. The neurologist said she had probably had the disease for some time. At least we now knew what we were up against.

I cared for Joan at home twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, attending her every need. Within another year, she could no longer do anything for herself. I bathed, dressed, fed and cleaned her. I picked her up and carried her everywhere she needed to go. Just trying to make it through one day at a time was our life for two years. Then Joan fell out of bed one night, and I had a heart attack trying to get

her back into bed. The children decided that incident was the last straw and insisted that we put Joan in a nursing home where she would receive proper care, and I could get relief. Joan was in the nursing home for almost two years. I visited her every day, massaged her ridged legs, and read to her. As the weeks and months drug by, Joan gradually deteriorated to the end stage of her disease. She was paralyzed, she could move only her eyes, and she could not speak. Her life was now a continuum; lay in bed and stare at the ceiling and hurt.

In consultation with the children and Joan's medical caregivers, I decided it was time to call in hospice. Joan was placed on a continuous morphine drip and was now mercifully obviously to the non-stop pain she had been enduring.

I arrived in her room around nine o'clock on the morning of April 25, 2010, and read to her as was my habit. I had no idea if she could hear me reading, but I want to believe she did. I finished reading and engaged the hospice nurse in conversation.

We could not believe it, but we saw Joan reaching toward the ceiling while quietly talking to someone. I rushed over and sat at her bedside.

“Joan, honey, who are you talking to? What is going on?”

“I am talking to Jesus, He is coming to take me home in a few minutes, but first, He has given me time to talk to you. There are a few things I want to tell you, sweetheart—do not talk, just listen.”

From the other side of the room the hospice nurse said, “This cannot be, Mr. Archer. She is paralyzed and cannot speak.”

But for the next forty-five minutes, Joan spoke of our life together, why she loved me, and what she wanted me to do after she goes home with Jesus—then she closed her eyes and died—with a beautiful smile on her face. I got on my knees and thanked God for His miracle.

The hospice nurse walked over to me and placed a hand on my shoulder and said, “Mr. Archer, we have witnessed a true miracle. In my twenty years as a hospice nurse, I have never seen anything like this.”

“Yes we have, Mrs. Jenkins, God has blessed me with a miracle. What a

wonderful, blessed gift and I shall cherish it  
as long as I'm on this earth." Amen.

## **Forever Love**

**By Judy K. Haught**

No one knows how I feel tonight;  
Oh, to be held in his arms so tight!

He is so weak in body; he doesn't know  
My heart is aching and to him I can't show.

I yearn to be in his arms tonight;  
Just hold me for a little while really tight.

I have been living life as if we will be living  
forever;  
Yet I see you slowly walk feebly, needing  
support.

I love this precious man God gave me 55  
years ago;  
It was all in His divine plan before I knew it  
to be so.

I care for him in his body, now I need to  
realize  
The Lord has a plan as our years are  
growing short.

Father God, thank you for blessing me with  
his love;  
And Father, I pray he can hold me. Give  
strength from above.

We praise you for the mental capacity with  
which we can share  
The words of love and times we can come  
to You in prayer.

Help me be all he needs and love him  
forever into eternity;  
May our remaining days be filled with Your  
blessed peace.

## **MEMORIOUSOPATHY**

### **Commander Data Dementia Drill**

**By Gerard Sarnat**

Fourth & final visit this trip,  
thus far I've attained no clear contact.

Slowly, Mother pulls back from space  
to my Q & A. Pause... Yes, I know you.  
Pause... You are family. Pause...  
You are my son. Pause... Gerry.

So all the smiles & nods were not just hard  
of hearing or cottonball bluffs.  
What can I do for you, Mom?

That's a sweet thought but I'm fine.

Mom, I've led a happy life, had a happy family  
plus medical career like Daddy.

I have you & Dad to thank.

Ger, what a nice compliment, thanks,  
are Mommy's final words as she stares  
through bougainvillea nosegays  
outside her window then nods off.

Maybe next time, Mom will  
have slipped off a century's tether

# Remembering You

By Erika B. Girard

I still remember the last time we talked before the accident.

I still recall your voice on the other end of the line, your tentativeness reassuring me you cared. It made me feel like I mattered, a feeling that has faded into wistfulness since the accident.

I still understand the hesitation you didn't think I noticed when we went to say goodbye at the end of that call and neither of us really wanted to, although my bus was liable to pull up at any moment and you'd answered my call in a client's basement. I ragged on you for that and in mock exasperation told you to get back to work, which still prompts a trace of a smile

when I think of it. It's different thinking about it now, after the accident. I had known it needed to be a quick call. But I'm almost relieved it was our last call.

I still hear the echo of your laughter. It whispers through my memories as if yet alive, your chuckle a steel plow across a gravel drive, your laugh punctuating the silence in my echoic chamber. It survived the accident and has yet to disappear from my chest.

I still relive those beautiful memories that we shared over our short time as, dare I say, best friends. I remember feeling like I never wanted to live without that amazing crutch, the support you served when I needed it most...and least...and all times in between. You occupied a space in my heart that will always ache for what I never knew.

You always used to make it sound like I was the best thing that had ever happened to you, and it took a while but I even started to believe it. Our correspondence was my favorite. It always lifted my heart, which now beats with the painful reminder of the accident because your kindness never failed to make me blush. Always ending with “You’re the best!” with a sequentially greater amount of exclamation marks and smiley faces as the months passed, your writing strengthened as we did.

The messages kept coming. And coming. And coming. Even after the accident.

The accident still weighs heavy in my mind.

The accident.

The circumstance, really.

The time that lengthened between messages, causing our friendship to run aground on rocky shoals as you registered the unfairness while I was too blinded by my concerns to recognize the slow approach of land. I wasn't entirely aware of it at the time, but that accident cost me a friend as much as it saved me from dying to myself.

The accident.

That accident.

It was an accident, ghosting you. Not entirely, but enough. The days between our correspondence accidentally morphed into weeks and then the weeks became months. I used work as an excuse and placed sleep on a higher pedestal than you. That doesn't sound like much, but it was enough. I allowed God to rescue me from my island of

conformity without telling you. Everything happened so quickly and so slowly that I can hardly comprehend. It was accidental. Or accidentally-on-purpose. I meant to do it, but not for it to hurt you so. I didn't even know what ghosting meant until I was struck dumb by the Merriam-Webster definition. It convicted me of what I'd done, something I wasn't quite comfortable with reliving. Ghosting was supposed to be a light word, not a word that would make me want to shrink at the mere mention of your name. Ghosting, to me, still meant the spooky game of ding-dong-ditch I loved and hated in my old neighborhood in the weeks leading up to Halloween, always with a bucket of fun school supplies and treats and a paper cutout of a ghost to tag the ghostee as the next ghoster. But then it meant you. It

meant the accident: I accidentally took you for granted.

I accidentally traded your genuine kindness for a safe landing without warning you, jumping ship as the metaphorical iceberg approached when I realized what I'd constructed in my mind was different than the way things would actually be if we continued down the paths we were traversing. I sorrowed but did not look back, for "Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death," according to 2 Corinthians 7:10, and I favored Godly sorrow.

I accidentally packed up my emotions and moved out of a friendship that had been built to surround me with care and trust, not realizing then that what I perceived

as suffocating beams actually sheltered me from the world and protected me from harm. I could never tell you that I didn't want more than what we were. Not merely because I was afraid of losing your friendship--which I ultimately did--but because I was secretly afraid that I did want more, though I knew deep down I didn't. I was content with listening to "Perfectly" on repeat, aware that as Chelsea Lee's words mingled with Jason Reeves's voice, they conveyed the very sentiments I could never share with you outright.

I accidentally forgot to inform you that I was worried you wanted more than friendship with me, because I wanted more than friendship with you but then I didn't. We were too alike to complement each

other yet too different to suit, despite what church family said.

I accidentally drifted away from you, even as I preserved the moments like fossils in the raft of driftwood memories I stole from the us that never was.

I accidentally plunged the oars into the water with deeper strokes as Jesus took my hand and we left you on the shore of my past.

I accidentally failed to remember what it felt like to be left there all alone myself, and I'm honestly grateful that the you I abandoned on that shoreline has moved on to a better horizon.

# **The Passing of Time**

## **By Sandy Loam**

Photos, not digital, still intact,  
    needing albums to save them in;  
Ephemera... tickets, brochures,  
    x-rays, greeting cards, programmes;  
Dusty books for feeding,  
    inspiration and reflection;  
Children's medals catching dust;  
Folded and unfolded clothes;  
Flowering plants that need pruning;  
Outgrown bike shoes, black shoes, walking  
shoes;  
An old quilt, a kaleidoscope, child's old uke;  
A pang of sadness,  
Time does not stand still,  
It will all pass away.

“For, ‘All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’” —1 Peter 1:24-25

## **Beauty for Ashes**

**By Jane Beal, PhD**

“...provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.”

Isaiah 61:3

During Holy Week, I meditated on the fire that took place in the Cathedral Basilica of Notre Dame in Paris, wondering: why now? Why after that beautiful church survived the Middle Ages, the French Revolution, World War I, World War II, and so many other hazards of time and chance? The Cathedral is the heart of Paris, the heart of France: an iconic symbol of national

identity, beloved by people all over the world.

Like many others, I felt the fire burning in the Cathedral as a terrible grief and a piercing loss. I have walked around it and inside of it, taken pictures of its towering spires and stained-glass windows, stood beside its statue of my name-saint, Jeanne d'Arc, and fallen in love with its majesty while praying in its cool shadows. So much beauty was destroyed in the fire – and for what? I knew the stone foundations were still in place, and still strong, but that did not feel like enough.

Then, I heard two stories related to the fire in the Cathedral Basilica of Notre Dame that truly touched my heart and gave me hope that the destruction could be redeemed. The first one is honestly

amazing: in response to the crisis of the declining bee population, beekeepers were caring for hives of bees on the rooftop of the cathedral ... and the bees survived the fire. So much burned down to the ground, but the bees survived! I felt in my heart that this was a special grace from God.

Second, the Cathedral was actually in the process of being renovated when this terrible fire broke out, and the work was expensive. But in response to the massive fire, close to a billion dollars have been donated to help rebuild it! It is possible that, in time, we will see beauty from ashes here.

But third, and even more amazing – at least, to me – was the protest that was sparked by the donations. There were people in the street asking why so much money was being given to rebuild a

cathedral. Should it be used to rebuild a church? Should it be given to feed and clothe the poor? Yes and yes, I said! What a wonderful debate! With a billion dollars, it should be possible to re-build the Cathedral Basilica of Notre Dame in Paris and give to many, many people in need. This is a worthy debate – much worthier than many that take up air-time and screen-time these days.

It helped me to meditate on the fire in the cathedral, and on these stories, seeing that in the midst of a monumental tragedy for art, culture, French national identity, international tourism, and the Christian faith something beautiful could begin to emerge, phoenix-like, from the ashes.

## **BACK-UP, SATAN!**

**By Wanda J. Burnside**

“No weapon formed against me shall prosper....” —Isaiah 54:17

Remember, DON'T DOUBT!

God will work it out

He will bring you through

He's working it out for you

This problem is only a test

God's going to give you the best

You feel like you're in a dark pit

But, God will bring you out of it

Satan and his demons **MUST FLEE!**

Tell him, “The Lord will deliver me!”

The Blood of Jesus will not fail  
Send them running back to hell

Keep calling on Jesus' name every day  
Let His Spirit come in and have His way  
Stand and believe on God's Holy Word  
Cling to overcoming testimonies you've  
heard

Jesus! Jesus! Our Redeemer and Hope  
Back-up Satan! We say, "Nope!"  
Thank You, Lord! Praise Your Name  
By the power of God, You're not the same!

## **Vain Repetitions**

### **by Rachelle Larsen**

In a surge of anger I hid my face from you  
for a moment, but with everlasting kindness  
I will have compassion on you," says the  
LORD your Redeemer.  
Isaiah 54:8

The fourth and final suicide occurred  
in apartment 225 like I had predicted.

I found out through a snapchat of the  
body bag.

I never even learned her name.

#

I was attending a religious university,  
and my complex (called Millwood) was

zoned for non-married college students. This means that not only were the residents unusually homogenous in terms of age, marital status, and education, but we all—supposedly—attended the same church meetings as well. I should have recognized the people I saw parking in the lot, playing in the basketball court, climbing the apartment stairs, but instead, I saw strangers scurrying to their various private rooms, heads ducked with earbuds in, and the rec centers remained largely unused. Our homogeneity didn't manifest as unity, or even familiarity; if anything, people knew they should belong, knew they should be at church, and the dissonance between expectation and reality thrust the residents further apart.

The isolation wasn't always so obvious, not in the beginning. As I played organ each Sunday, I would look out at over a hundred singing souls; they clustered together unevenly across the pews, their mouths moving to the hymns that my fingers, spider-like, solicited from the ivories. There were enough voices that the harmonies blended even though individual voices were rough, or shrill, or slightly out of tune. Music is one of the oldest metaphors for unity and connection, and we were singing the oldest music that we knew, so it was easy to feel like all was well in Zion.

The clusters were the first warning signs. We should have had close to two hundred people, filling all pews, preventing clusters from forming due to lack of space. Instead, the spaces grew. Over time, I saw

more and more people look for a cluster to join, then sit alone, or leave before the closing prayer, or duck their heads into the room without entering. Various levels of distance from the community were manifest in their literal proximity, and that proximity stretched, strained, and then snapped, the clusters shrinking like the people were puddles of water drying up on the pavement, until there were only forty or so of us left where once there had been many.

After the first three suicides, I started looking out over the congregation for signs of distress: tears, abnormal isolation, nervous fidgeting, rocking, etc. But then I realized that it wasn't the active members who had committed suicide: it was those members who were simply gone. And so I started looking at the ugly, brown carpeted

pews between clusters and wondered who should be there. Who was missing.

#

It's hard to say why our congregation fell apart. I wonder if it was in part because of our bishop, but then again, he could only be a symptom rather than a cause. He greeted me every Sunday as he passed the organ on his way to his seat:

“How are you? You're good, you're always good,” he would inform me, brushing past me to his seat; there was a falseness, a shallowness, in the way he asked that question. He asked it I struggled deeply with depression. As the congregation dwindled. As people died.

*No, I'm not always good, I wanted to say to repent of the lie he forced into my*

mouth each week. But I never corrected him because his words lingered longer than he did, and by the time I thought to speak, he was already gone, customary greeting completed, ready for use in a week's time when he spoke at me again.

His vain repetition lied for me so often that once, when he asked me how I was and actually waited for an answer, I completed the lie for him anyways. "Good," I said. With so many lies already between us, there was no space left to divulge any part of my soul.

To be fair, I didn't start the lie, and neither did Bishop Rodriguez. Societally, we've agreed that "how are you" should often pretend to be a question but function as a transition; it's a silence-filler when we pass someone in the street, or a

conversation starter before getting down to business. In this context when we ask how someone is, implying care for their well-being, we mean the opposite: we push aside the human and push forward the agenda. We ask: can I dismiss how you are and continue with what I was doing? And then we answer: yes, you can ignore how I am.

I wonder about how we greeted each other at Millwood. Rarely did we ask “how are you” as we passed each other. Did we recognize the lie in it, the false care? If so, it makes sense that my bishop didn’t wait for a response, and the rest of us rarely asked at all. Why ask for a soul that you don’t want? Souls are heavy. Dense. Chewy. When given a soul, I try to take them into my heart through my mouth—

through my words—but my tongue is unruly and graceless, and so I linger on them like I'm masticating leather: which in a sense, I am. Because no matter how much I listen, I only get the surface of any given soul. Just the hide. Just the leather. And who wants to chew leather?

#

Sometimes, when I pray, I ask God how He's doing. I feel awkward talking about myself, and prayers can tend to be a lot of self-absorption. There's a lot of will-you-help-me-with-this and tell-me-what-I-should-do and my-day-was-hard-will-you-listen-to-me-think-aloud. But I want a relationship with Him, and relationships go both ways, so I try to ask about how He feels.

When I ask about Him, I get the vague feeling of amusement mixed with love—like a head-pat after presenting a crayon-drawn family picture—but it's not patronizing. It's not my fault that I can't comprehend the mental and emotional health of an eternal, omniscient being. (Health: like it's something that fluctuates, but what does that mean to someone who's perfect?) I have only a small idea of who He even is. He is someone who loves me with infinite intensity. He is also someone who allows people He loves both to suffer and to cause suffering.

When I ask about His children, I get more of a response; feed my sheep, He says. He brings His children to my thoughts, showing how precious and strong they are, and then He rhetorically asks, how are

they? I guess God is someone who prefers not to talk about Himself too. Or maybe He's someone who talks less about His feelings and more about His thoughts, and His thoughts are about His children. Or maybe my vain repetitions have built up too much between us, and in any case, I would be decimated under the weight He bears.

But every now and again still, I ask Him how He's doing. I don't know what I expect, but I think He likes that I care how He feels, even if I can't comprehend it. I think humans are like their Father in that way; the incomprehensible is less unpleasant when someone cares.

#

Of those who died, I only met Devin, and only once. We briefly interacted one

winter afternoon as we passed in the parking lot. I asked how he was, and for his name, and then we parted. I tried looking him up in our church directory, wanting to reach out more authentically—to no avail—and then....I forgot about him until his mother stopped by a couple months later, worried by Devin's silence. It was her that found his week-dead body.

I assume she wasn't alone when she found her son; after all, someone had to let her into the apartment.

Though I only saw Devin once, I have strange connections to his life. His narcissistic roommate Carter dated my codependent roommate Tiffany; I wonder if he heard the same abuse I did, the same statements of you're fat, of you're selfish, of I need you to pay my rent. Did he interfere?

As I told Tiffany to break off the relationship, was Devin telling Carter to treat his girlfriend better? Or did he hide in his room even before he died there? Additionally, I knew Devin's brother Bridger from a previous housing complex; Bridger was kind to me. He asked how I was doing sometimes even though I was quiet, though we were never really friends. Again, I wonder; was Devin asked the same question? Was Bridger just as concerned about the welfare of his brother as he was about mine, a stranger? Or did Bridger look the other way?

I'm at the margins of Devin's story, so marginal that I'm not even a side character; I'm just scenery. I know that in any reality, alternate or otherwise, there's probably nothing that I could have done. Knowing of his brother Bridger, knowing of

the mother who found him, I imagine that he was loved. My love—unfounded as it is, weak as it is, since years later, I don't even remember if he was the first or second to die—would not have made a difference. Still. I don't know if I can dismiss him post-mortem and carry on my merry way, even if I know nothing about him besides the scruff he had one winter day and the way that he died months later. I want to ask him how he's doing now that he's shed this mortal coil. I want to speak to him in a kind of prayer. But when I think of reaching across the ether towards this man I don't know, I can't bring myself to do it; even now, I don't know if my love would make a difference.

#

After the first three deaths, but before the fourth, I found myself parked in a car up on Y mountain asking questions; the city lights below glimmered as a poor substitute for the smog-hidden stars. I wasn't alone; Jacob, another member of my congregation, was with me. I say member, but it was in name only, as by this point in his life, Jacob was an atheist; he just hadn't gotten around to cutting his religious affiliations. "I like the idea of God," he would say in consolation, but repeated tragedy in his life dissuaded him from belief.

Jacob wasn't new to suicide. At thirteen, his dad committed suicide. Five years later, his older brother committed suicide too. And as we sat on Y mountain, it was five years since then, and Jacob

himself was suffering from with that same darkness, though he and I didn't often talk about his suicidal tendencies. We spoke about the suicides in the congregation more than we talked about ourselves.

I mused out loud from the front seat, reclined back so I could look through the sunroof at the opaque swathe of clouds above us. It wasn't much a view. Not very helpful either. I never found a real conclusion to my main question: how to alleviate the suffering? There was so much of it. How to promote happiness? There was so little. How to inspire connection? There wasn't enough.

I don't remember what I was saying specifically—idle musings don't stick well to my memory—but I made Jacob angry by making some comment about his dad. He

glared at me, body tense and eyes direct, aggressive. “He did the best he could,” Jacob said, speaking of his dad.

“Yeah, but wouldn’t you rather your dad were here?” I said. “I don’t think it had to end that way. It could have been different, the world could be better.”

“Do you really think that you can change the world?” Jacob demanded.

“Yes,” I responded before I realized what it would sound like.

“Really.” Jacob leaned back against his passenger window, staring at me incredulously, at a loss for words. “Well, okay then.”

I tried to explain what I meant. It’s not that I can change the world, not me as a single, miniscule human. But at the same time, in a strange Orwellian double-think, I

must believe that what I do matters. I must believe the lie to make it the truth. If enough of us believe that we can alleviate the suffering around us, collectively, maybe we can succeed. Everywhere. Across the whole globe. It's the same lie we must believe for democracy to thrive: that out of those millions of votes, mine matters, and it matters because millions of little nothings combined together become a whole lot of something important.

I must believe that it's true.

#

Sometimes, when I want to ask God how He's doing, I just can't. Usually, it's because I haven't spoken to Him in too long, or my prayers have become perfunctory, or I've monopolized the

conversation with my own wishes and desires. In short, we've grown apart because I'm not holding up my end of the relationship.

Whenever I ask another human how they are doing, I mentally prepare myself for whatever may be required of me. It's not that people specifically request help when I ask, but proactive service is the difference between being superficially nice and genuinely compassionate; and in those delicate moments when I request a soul, so precious and strong, I want to be nothing but compassionate. To be in the same place at the same time as another human is magical, consuming; there have been over a hundred billion of us since the race began, you know, so for any given two to touch? To connect? It's a statistical miracle. I would

say any given relationship is one in a billion, but I would be lying; it's not nearly so common. One hundred and eight billion humans allows for about six quadrillion different pairs of people, and if you take into account that people themselves change over time, there are an infinite number of variations of people connecting with other variations of people: asking for any given soul in any given time is a singular, unique experience, never to be repeated quite the same.

By extension, any missed chance will never come again.

God is another story. He is always present because He is not changed by time and space. He's only ever a thought away, if even that. If I haven't asked how He is, or haven't done anything to serve Him, then it

is either because of negligence or willful disregard. Feed my sheep, He says. This is His unchanging goal, an eternal goal, something that was never new. If I hesitate to ask about His welfare, it is because I know what He wants from me, and I either haven't been giving it to Him, or I don't know if I can give it anymore. I'm afraid of what is required.

This also means that sometimes, I duck my head with my headphones on as I scurry down the street, ignoring the people I pass because I can't bear any more weight. I can't chew anymore leather.

#

The final death occurred in apartment 225 as I had predicted.

Suffice it to say that after three suicides, my eyes started aching from looking, looking, looking at everyone I saw for warning signs, and I decided, no more. No one else can die. I determined our weak spot by writing the empty spaces on my whiteboard, finding the emptiest one: apartment 225. It was disconnected, largely unknown—the most unknown—and therefore the greatest risk. I talked to everyone—church leaders, friends, acquaintances—but 225 remained separate. And three weeks later, she was gone. I found out through a snapchat of the body bag as it was removed from the complex. “Someone else is dead,” a friend remarked on seeing the snapchat.

I didn't feel any sense of self-blame. I knew it was silly to take on the

responsibility of caring for everyone within a 25-meter radius. But it didn't change the fact that I had known. I had known it. Looking at the relationships, looking at the people, I had known that 225 was our weak spot. And now someone was dead. Again. Again. Again. Another one bites the dust.

That night, I sat in my car staring at a streetlight. No energy. Shoulder slumped. Hunched forward. Hands on steering wheel. Car off, going nowhere, hardly breathing, only pupils reacting, the street lamp's halo ebbing like a flashing siren, like reacting to my pulsing blood rather than a change in light.

How does God do it? Does He just know our suffering ends in a blink of an eye, like pulling off a band-aid, and so He's at peace with it? Or does He just know that

we'll come home soon, and He can wrap His arms around us like it was a bad dream?

The official story was that she simply died. No reason. Not suicide. Just simple, inexplicable death. She was dead for a few days before a roommate noticed that the dog wasn't being fed, knocked on her bedroom door, and found her corpse. But inexplicably dead? Few of us believed this story. It felt like a well-meaning lie; if you don't call it suicide, then it can't lead to a chain of suicides, right? Not more of them, at least.

I wish that I could have asked her how she felt. She went from being an empty space on a pew, to an empty space on my white board, to a snap-chatted body bag. I never even learned her name. I never knew

who she was, let alone how she was, and now she's simply and permanently gone.

#

The question “how are you” is significant. Every time we lie when answering that question—or ask it in vain—and thereby reject a soul, we are denying ourselves one of the closest things to a divine connection that exists. We are thwarting the closest thing to *deus ex machina* that the universe can offer: another human who cares enough to ask and act. And sure, we are humans, not God: our hearts are weak, and we can only take so much. But if we all committed to care, doing our part to uplift, surely the burden would be more manageable. Surely the world would

change, if just a little, and suffering wouldn't be quite so rampant.

I must believe that it's true.

# **BELIEVE and LIVE!**

**By Wanda J. Burnside**

Don't let the buzzards and vultures  
Fly circling above your head  
For they are waiting and watching  
For you to drop dead

They don't want you to live  
They are hoping you won't survive  
But, keep pressing on and don't quit  
Say, "I will live and not die!"

Life is hard in so many different ways  
Things can really get so tough  
Challenges, difficulties, test and trials  
Sometimes you want to say, "Enough!"

When you have tried and tried so hard  
With all of your strength and might  
Yet, things don't turn out like you want  
You still must continue to fight!

Some people may want you to give up  
Because they hope you will fail  
They don't want you to press on  
Persevere, succeed and excel

Don't let the buzzards and vultures  
Circle around your head  
Don't allow their evil thoughts  
Interfere with what the Holy Bible said

God has given you His angels  
To keep you so you won't fall  
They are there to protect you  
God will send them when you call

The buzzards and vultures  
Want you to always fear  
They don't want you to believe  
That God is standing near

Ignore what they are trying to do  
Reject their schemes and plans  
Stand firm in faith and know  
You are in God's almighty hands

Although you may stumble  
Along life's journey and way  
God will provide for you  
No matter what others say

Life may look miserable and down  
And filled with loads of problems too  
Just be assured and stay strong

God has great blessings for you

Don't allow fearful thoughts  
And worries to circle over your head  
They're like those buzzards and vultures  
That want you to fail and fall dead

They will play with your thoughts  
And depress your very mind  
Trying to control your destiny  
So leave them far behind

Look up and see Jesus  
For He will bring you out  
He is your help and strength  
Don't continue to fear and doubt

Those buzzards and vultures  
Never will devour you as dead meat

You're covered in the Blood of Jesus!  
Satan isn't above,  
He's under your feet!

# **Veteran Suicide: Lamenting as I Sing By Susannah Cragwick**

I've been singing the National Anthem for various events since high school. In my community, I'm the go-to for 9/11, Memorial Day and sometimes other ceremonies. What is it like to be the National Anthem performer? Here's my truth. I am only human.

I don't relate to or connect with the lyrics at all no matter how many times I've heard the story of how they were written. When I'm singing, I feel like I'm on autopilot and a completely different narrative is actually going through my mind. My soul and spirit do not connect with the words I

am singing, but rather with the people I'm singing for.

“Oh say can you see....and the home of the brave.” A bell is going to toll 22 times bringing forth a moment of silence for each Veteran who completed suicide in my state. No, wait! That number is wrong. More names, faces, souls have recently been added to the list. The bell tolls for them too. A mother stands by a cross that bears her son's name. There are 22 crosses, 22 lives gone too soon.

“This is what the Lord says: ‘A voice is heard in Ramah, mourning and great weeping, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:15 N.I.V.)

I let my voice honor and mourn those lost in hopes that the beauty and

serenity of my voice creates space for others to do and express what their mind and soul needs.

“And the rocket’s red glare, the bombs bursting in air...” Did they start feeling hopeless over there... wherever ‘there’ was or was it at home that things became so final?

“And the home of the brave” .... Veterans often don’t receive the proper care that they need. We keep losing more and more to the epidemic of suicide. Many are on the streets. I don’t know if we have built a home for the brave, but I am hoping someday we will. We owe that to them.

Confession time. You know the awesome thing about performing the National Anthem? Control.

I sing those first five notes and a room full of chaos goes completely silent. Everything and everyone is still if only for a few moments. If I start singing, I can rip the pedestal from under cliché, false-lipped politicians and make them be quiet. I have the power to turn everyone's attention towards the ones who truly deserve honor, the ones whose stories we must hear. That's not something I take lightly.

My whole life is this weird juxtaposition between singing the most patriotic song ever and wondering what the hell is wrong with our country (yes, such thoughts are sometimes going through my mind as I am singing).

Thank you, Veterans, for your service. I sing to repay an unpayable debt

with the hope that one day my voice will save one soldier from the battle at home.

Maybe if I keep singing, the bell will stop tolling.

22, 21, 20, 19...then one day, the bell went silent and no more crosses needed to be built.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4 N.I.V.)

## **God's Place of Visitation**

**By Ramelle T. Lee**

Lord, intercept my wandering thoughts.  
You have my full and undivided attention in  
prayer.

My world has been shaken to the core.  
Counsel my troubled, weary, and hurting  
heart.

Give me Your heavenly instructions  
And the right course of action.

Please speak to me.  
Touch the tenderness of my hurt.  
Dry up my tears...  
That are falling down my face.  
Please remove the veil of doubt and fear;  
That has come to overshadow my spirit.

Please answer me from Your Holy Hill,  
So that I can walk in complete victory.

O Lord!,

I await Your Holy visitation.  
Grant me Your peace,  
In the midst of this chaos,  
Where the enemy seeks to devour me.  
My eyes are totally fixed upon You.  
I know my breakthrough has come!

## **The Necessary Struggle**

**By Kim Bond**

I lifted my face from the icy snow midway down the slope. I had lost feeling in my fingers, but my legs ached. I looked down. They were twisted in some unnatural way. The ski poles were just out of reach. This was the fifth time I had wiped out, and my forty-five-year-old body had become too fatigued to pull myself up again. My will was sapped. I hoped my teenage son had not seriously injured himself because I was in no shape to help him. It wasn't supposed to be this way.

In my plan, my husband and I would start taking our children to ski at a very young age. Well, that was the plan before I

had children. It was the plan I devised as I skied down a mountain for the first time in my healthy twenty-year-old body. After the children were born, it took every cent to keep ourselves financially afloat. Even local ski trips were out of the question for fourteen long years. Then we somehow got financially stabilized. Well, we were at least stable enough to rent a pair of skis for myself and a snowboard for my teenaged son. My teen daughter opted to snow tube down a nearby hill instead, and my husband preferred to stay safe and warm at home. When I laid on that snowy mountain wondering how I would get up, I started to value his point of view.

In that emotional despair, I cried out to God with one of the most desperate prayers of my lifetime. I am uncertain of my

exact words, but there were tears rolling down my eyes when I finished. It was something about the struggle. I prayed about my situation on the mountain. Yet, it came from a place in my soul that had grown weary in life. My beloved husband and I both worked hard every day. We drove practical cars. My kids made sacrifices, and they were good kids! Even strangers complimented them on their good character. Why was the struggle so necessary?

I prayed for God to give me one last boost of energy so I could stand on my skis. What I meant was I needed God to strengthen and sustain me for the latter years of my life—the final struggle. I brushed the tears from my eyes.

A passing skier offered to help twice, but I refused. I wanted to do it on my own. After my pride breathed its last breath, I accepted help from a second passing skier. I nearly dragged her down into the snow as she attempted to steady me in a standing position. Still weak, I wobbled like a doe as I thanked the Good Samaritan. She flew down the slopes with ease. By the grace of God, I managed to ski the rest of the way down the mountain without wiping out again.

The glaring sun made it difficult for me to make out anyone's features, but my son spotted me near the bottom of the mountain. He excitedly told me how well he boarded down the mountain even though it was his very first time. His self-esteem was in full-throttle. He took the ski lift back to the

top of the mountain alone while I made my way over to the beginner hill. After a few times down the mountain, he skied with me on the bunny slope.

After we tired, we returned our rented equipment and walked back to the car. During the drive home, my son showed such gratitude. He could not stop thanking me for the wonderful day he had on the slopes. Honestly, I had fun too after my crisis on the mountain had subsided. My mind turned to the hypothetical drive home if my life had gone according to my plan. Our ski trip would have just been another day. We would have taken it for granted. My children may not have developed the understanding and compassion that builds character. Who knows? My husband and I

might have become bored and apathetic in life instead of deeply in love.

Suddenly, the struggle felt like a blessing. The conclusion of my thoughts felt like an answer from God to my question on the slope. There is a reason for all of the trials in our lives. That reason may not be obvious to us when we are going through the struggle, but the struggle is very necessary. God has not forgotten us. He is loving us.

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts

through the Holy Spirit, who has been given  
to us.” —Romans 5: 3-5

## **Dance With Me**

**By Molly**

(Lament for the brokenhearted & lonely)

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Psalm 34:18

Oh Abba, will you dance with me tonight?  
Hold me in Your strong omnipotent might?  
Pick me up--let's whirl through galaxies and  
space

Take me in Your arms of loving grace  
A broken heart you never will despise,  
You hear each silent sob that my heart cries

I'm offering my hand; please twirl me once  
again

Sweep away the darkness and the pain;  
I need Your arms around me, to feel Your  
strength and might  
Like frightened child cries, "Hold me! Hold  
me tight!"  
My broken heart you told me, You never will  
despise  
You hear each silent sob that my heart  
sighs

So pick me up and dance with me my  
Faithful-Father Friend  
Whispering Your love will never end  
Lead me to that dance floor where the starry  
rivers flow  
Dancing cheek to cheek so I will know--  
This broken heart of mine You never will  
despise  
You hear each silent sob that my heart cries

I need for You to hold me, with all your  
strength and might

Please, dance with me, dance with me  
tonight

~~~~~

I will build you up again,

and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt.

Again you will take up your timbrels

and go out to dance with the joyful.

They will come and shout for joy on the  
heights of Zion;

they will rejoice in the bounty of the

LORD—

the grain, the new wine and the olive oil,

the young of the flocks and herds.

They will be like a well-watered garden,

and they will sorrow no more.

Then young women will dance and be glad,

young men and old as well.

I will turn their mourning into gladness;

I will give them comfort and joy instead of  
sorrow.

Jeremiah 31: 4, 12, 13

## **Note to the Readers**

There's a difference between knowing about God and truly knowing God. You may know about God from reading the Bible. In each chapter, you may be guessing His motivations and piecing together aspects of His character. Truly knowing God comes from making Him lord of your life—giving Him control of your life, inviting His Holy Spirit inside of your very being. Then when you read the Bible, He will reveal Himself and His motivations to you. He will make Himself known through the circumstances of your life.

God is sovereign. His will gets done no matter what. It's best to join the winning team now and invite the Lord of the Universe, the Maker of Heaven and Earth to

be your Counselor when times are tough. Take refuge in the Lord by accepting Jesus Christ as your Savior and welcoming the Holy Spirit into your life with this prayer:

God, You created me so You know me quite well. Now I want to get to know You—really get to know You, Your character, Your cleverness, Your power, Your love. I invite You to make my body a temple for the Holy Spirit to live inside of me and teach me. You laid down Your life by dying on the cross. Now I lay down my life so You can take it up. I give You my every fear, sorrow, and disappointment. Take it from me, and comfort me in all of my pain. Use it for good. Forgive me for my sins and failures. Thank You that You hear me and love me and care for me even though You

are beyond understanding. In Christ's Name, Amen.

Congratulations on your decision to draw near to our Lord. James 4:8 states that if we come near to God that He will come near to us. If you made that decision today or any day of your life, trust that He is coming alongside you in every difficult moment of your life. You are not alone in your suffering, and there is purpose in it all. Thanks for reading and stay blessed!

## About the Authors

**Erika B. Girard** is a graduate of Saint Leo University in Florida with her B.A. in English Literary Studies and a minor in Hospitality Management. Originally from Rhode Island, she loves her family, friends, faith, and finding suitable words to express concepts beyond herself. She claims writing, proofreading, and photography as some of her greatest passions and says, “Challenge yourself to great things; if you find something you can’t do, try harder.”

**Gerard Sarnat MD**’s won the Poetry in the Arts First Place Award plus the Dorfman Prize; has been nominated for Pushcarts plus Best of the Net Awards; authored *HOMELESS CHRONICLES* (2010), *Disputes* (2012), *17s* (2014) and

*Melting The Ice King* (2016); and is widely published including recently by New Ulster, Gargoyle, Stanford, Oberlin, Wesleyan, Johns Hopkins, Virginia Commonwealth, Harvard, University of Edinburgh, Columbia, Brown, Main Street Rag, *American Journal Of Poetry*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *New Delta Review*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, *San Francisco Magazine*, *New York Times*. Mount Analogue selected "KADDISH" for distribution nationwide Inauguration Day. Poetry was chosen for a 50th Harvard reunion Dylan symposium. Gerry's been married since 1969 with three kids, five grandsons and looking forward to future granddaughters.

**Jane Beal, PhD** has created many collections of poetry, including *\_Sanctuary\_* (2008), *\_Rising\_* (2015) and *\_Song of the*

*Selkie\_* (forthcoming) as well as three audio recording projects: “Songs from the Secret Life,” “Love-Song,” and “The Jazz Bird.” She also writes magical realist fiction, creative non-fiction, literary criticism, and music, and she teaches at the University of La Verne in southern California:

<http://janebeal.wordpress.com>.

**Judy K. Haught**, Christian 48 years. She began with short stories, and poetry. She discovered her writings were always ending with Christ as Victorious, showing Him as the “Great I Am.”

**Molly ~ wound dresser** These are desperate days and people are losing hope in record numbers. “People need the LORD” just like the old Steve Green song said. My desire is to bring the gifts God has given me, of encouragement and teaching, to a

world dying for hope and searching for the healing, I believe, only Jesus Christ can bring to the wounded heart.

**Rachelle Larsen** was born and raised in Spring, Texas. Currently, she is pursuing a Creative Writing MFA at BYU while teaching high school Physics and Chemistry.

**Ramelle T. Lee**, author, poet, businesswoman, staff writer for *The Lamp Newsletter*. Former co-host and news anchor for Restore! Restore! radio ministry for six seasons 2016-2019. Founder and President of Touching Your Heart Ministries, to reach people who feel hopeless, deeply hurt, rejected, wounded and broken-hearted. She has published over 50 poems and numerous other meditation messages. Three of her books are available on

Amazon.com: *Step into His Greatness, For You... A Prayer For Our Family*, and *Rescued by God's Almighty Power*. Author Lee has eleven basket ministries to reach women, men, boys, teens, and little children. She desires to bring hope and joy to others through the message of God's love. Ramelle resides in Detroit, MI.

**Ross Archer** is a retired Colonel from the US Army where he served 23 years. He is an active Rotarian and a Gideon. He and his wife reside in Thomasville, Georgia and share five children, six grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

**Sandra Lynn Hickman** is an Australian author, writer, poet and songwriter. A mother of two adult daughters and a grandmother of 12 wonderful

blessings. Born in Fremantle Western Australia, she currently lives south of the capital city of Perth, Western Australia. Sandra is the Australian Headquarters Ministry Leader and Staff Writer for *The Lamp Newsletter* in Detroit USA. She considers writing as a marvellous mission to spread the name of Jesus. Sandra is a Contributing Author to six Christian Publications. Her ambition is to see her beloved book entitled “The Letter” published.

**Sandy Loam** is the pen name of a wife and mother from Los Baños and Bay, Laguna, Philippines. A researcher at heart, she occasionally writes as the Lord leads. She also loves to sing and play some instruments, making melody in her heart, as

well as gardening and sketching for the Lord.

**Susannah Cragwick** holds a Masters degree in Music Performance from The University of Montana and is the granddaughter of WWII Veterans. She currently resides in Missoula, Montana and runs her own business teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) and beginner and intermediate level Arabic.

**Wanda J. Burnside** is an author, poet, teacher and publisher/founder of *The Lamp Newsletter*. She is the founder and president of Write the Vision Ministries and Media Productions, Int'l. She has been married to Simmie Lee Burnside, Jr. since 1972. They reside in Detroit, MI.

## Draw Near Books

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