

# It's Not Over Until You Win

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My Lifetime of Experiencing the Miracles of God

MARILYN HICKEY

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## DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to . . .

My amazing family; specifically, my daughter, Sarah, and my son-in-law, Reece, along with my wonderful grandchildren who have loved me unconditionally;

My incredible team of loyal and hard-working staff members who have faithfully helped me cover the earth with the Word;

My friends and partners who have prayed unceasingly and given sacrificially to open the doors and provide the resources for me to minister to millions of people in over 137 nations around the world.

## FORWARD

It is a great honor to write the foreword for my friend Marilyn's life story. She is an amazing, beautiful woman of God, and I am blessed and inspired by her diligence and steadfast determination to go all the way with God in everything He's called her to do.

Marilyn has a special, very sincere love for people of all different cultures and ethnicities, which speaks loudly of God's heart for the world. She's a living example of what it means to love others as Jesus loves us—selflessly, putting their best interests and needs above her own. Many times, she's prayed fervently for people in various countries and it has opened up opportunities for her to go to those places and share the truth of the Gospel. These situations have also set the stage for God to do astounding miracles through Marilyn's ministry. Your life will change as you learn of Marilyn's wholehearted devotion to live for God and her unshakable faith that has taken her all over the world to share the Gospel. Her experiences will inspire everyone who reads her story to believe God can and will do what He says He will do as they walk out His plan for their lives.

I believe reading this book will restore your faith in miracles and open your heart to believe that with God, all things are possible. Your faith will be strengthened, and you may end up doing amazing things yourself.

—Joyce Meyer, best-selling author and Bible teacher

## INTRODUCTION

It was a very dangerous time in a very dangerous nation. A man with a gun was stationed outside the door of my hotel room 24/7 for protection because 32 suicide bombers had taken an oath to blow up the stadium with thousands of people, my entire team, and me in it. The government of that country had uncovered the plot, but they had not found or arrested all of the suicide bombers. The majority of those men, determined to kill me, were still out there. That is why the government officials told me that they could not allow me to continue with the evening hearing meetings we had been working on for over a year. They felt the situation was extremely volatile, massively dangerous, and too explosive. And they were right! Every logical instinct inside of me said to get out of there, quickly. But with God, it's not over until you win.

A few years earlier I had been in a different nation, teaching leaders of churches. The meetings had been set in the dark of night with nothing more than the glow of lanterns to illuminate those of us who were gathered. Some of the leaders had come from hundreds of miles away, mostly on foot, to receive encouragement and instruction from the Word of God. There was a sweet anointing as we opened the Scriptures, but each person who had come to receive had done so at great personal risk. It wasn't overly dangerous for me. Yes, I could be arrested and detained, but there wasn't much more that could be done to me. But for the leaders I was teaching, it was exceedingly dangerous. If we were discovered, they could be arrested, tortured, thrown in prison, or killed. But with God, it's not over until you win.

More recently, I was standing before the massive brick wall that marks the separation between Israel and Gaza. The vicious twists of barbed wire at the top of the wall were vivid reminders that this was a region where violence erupted often, frequently without warning. The heavily armed guards were vigilant and alert. Many would ask what I was doing there, who did I think I was, and how in the world did I think I was going to make it through the checkpoints and walk into Gaza? But I knew that I was supposed to go into that dangerous and war-torn area with the love of Jesus. Even though my paperwork had been carefully and accurately completed, I had been waiting for hours to receive permission to be processed through the checkpoints and walk the mile-long, dust-covered road into Gaza. It was getting later and later and the cut-off time for getting in was quickly approaching. Once again, I had to remind myself that with God, it's not over until you win.

More times than I can count, the Lord has put a country on my heart and prompted me to pray earnestly for that nation. Then He has led me to go there in order to share the good news of the Gospel and the healing power of Jesus Christ with those who would receive it. But many of those times, I have faced closed doors. The doors weren't just closed, they were seemingly locked, barred, and barricaded against me. Visas were denied again and again or promised but never given. Often it looked like the very thing God had called me to do was totally impossible. But with God, it's not over until you win.

What is the most difficult situation you are facing in your life right now? Does it seem hopeless, with insurmountable odds and innumerable obstacles? Does it seem impossible for you to succeed? I am inviting you to come with me as I detail the life I have lived. At times, I have experienced devastating defeats. Other times, I have tried and failed only to try and fail again. I have even stepped out, full of faith, and run straight into solid brick walls that would not budge. Yet, through it all, I can look back and say that I have truly enjoyed a lifetime of experiencing the miracles of God. My prayer is that you, too, will stand in faith in the midst of seemingly impossible situations and see for yourself that it's not over until you win.

Jesus is the most radical gift God could ever give. John 3:16 says, *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. . . ."* My prayer for you is that you would know the unconditional love of your heavenly Father and that His love would become even more real to you as you read this book; and ultimately, that you would know Jesus Christ more intimately as your personal Lord and Savior. As you will see, I have been blessed to walk a very supernatural life. Throughout this book, you will read about the specific journey I took in order to learn about the power of the Holy Spirit operating in the lives of believers. As I share those experiences, I pray that you would be encouraged to believe God for miracles in your life as well. I also realize that some of my experiences with the Holy Spirit may be foreign to you or outside the realm of your experience. Let me encourage you in this way: Do not get hung up on any experiential differences. In any area where you have questions, search the Bible for answers. John 16:13 says that He is the *"Spirit of truth"* and that He came to *"guide you into all truth."* No matter what you may be facing today, with your heavenly Father's love, Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, and the Holy Spirit leading and guiding you, it's not over until you win!

## CHAPTER 1

### FROM DUST TO ROMANCE

I was always a dreamer. Often, when I was young, I would look up at the sky and watch the airplanes fly by. I was fascinated by them. I was awed by how small they looked in the air, and always wondered where they were going. How did they fly? What kind of people were in those planes? I daydreamed about what the angels were doing and the wonderful destinations to which they were traveling. I enjoyed reveling in those imaginary travels and would think to myself with a smile, One day I will be on one of those planes! Of course, it seemed foolish, almost impossible, an unrealistic hope for a girl who lived in the dusty neighborhoods of a little Texas town during the Great Depression. I never even remotely imagined that one day I would fly in thousands of planes and minister to millions of people in 137 nations of the world.

My life began in a very ordinary way. I was born on July 1, 1931, Marilyn Aliene Sweitzer. I was the brown-haired, brown-eyed, firstborn child of Mary Alice and John Sweitzer, born in the small town of Dalhart, located in the northern corner of the Texas Panhandle. The Lone Star State in the 1930s was not a very pleasant place to live. Dalhart was in the center of the Dust Bowl, where long periods of drought and dry, swirling dust storms made life challenging. I remember days where the gritty particles of dust were everywhere. They filled our eyes, ears, and nose, and made it almost impossible to see, hear, or breathe. We took extra safety precautions because of the dangerous dust storms. When we traveled, we kept a big can of water in the trunk of our car so that if there was a dust storm, we could put wet cloths over our mouths to enable us to breathe through the dust.

Perhaps the scariest time of my childhood was being caught in a dust storm with my family. I was about three years old. We had driven to my grandparents' farm for a visit, which was something we regularly did as a family and I enjoyed immensely. That day, we were about to leave for home when we spotted thick storm clouds in the distance coming toward us. Quickly, my dad rushed us into the car and drove as fast as he could toward home. The dust storm caught up to us, making the ride slow and tedious. We kept wet cloths over our mouths the whole way. By the time we made the 15-mile journey home, the sky was so dark with dust that it felt like night, even though it was the middle of the day. After parking the car, we had to feel our way to the house since it was too dark with dust to see anything at all.

### My Family

Dad was a typical American worker, a pioneer in every sense of the word. He was a very hard-working family man who always made sure we had our basic needs met. We did not have a lot of life's creature comforts during those days of the Great Depression. However, I never felt that there was anything I needed as a child that I did not have. We had enough food to eat, and I felt loved. The house where I grew up was very special to me. My dad built it himself, a little three-room house with a garage, painted in a beautiful beige. Dad was very good with his hands and because of that, as difficult as the times were, we didn't feel the lack as intensely as many other families did. Indeed, in so many ways, they were good times, too.

I had lots of family near Dalhart. My mother, Mary Alice Moore, had been one of 11 children, and most of her siblings lived close by. My grandparents, who also lived in Dalhart, had a total of 22 grandchildren! So, I always had family around. As a little girl, I loved being with my grandmother. One of my earliest memories is of me sitting on my grandmother's lap as she dipped a homemade biscuit in coffee and fed it to me. She said to my mother, "This child is too thin; you need to feed her better." I never felt I was too thin, but my grandmother certainly did, and she didn't hesitate to tell my mother her thoughts.

I have some very delightful memories of farm life with my grandparents. I didn't live there, but I might as well have, as I made frequent visits to the farm. My grandfather and my uncles would leave the house very early to work the land, and my grandmother would work all morning to make lunch, the biggest meal of the day. I loved being in the kitchen with her. She would let me sit on the counter and "help" her cook and bake; prepping the food was exciting, too. There were always such sweet aromas coming from my grandmother's oven. I also have very fond memories of chasing the chickens and turkeys, helping my grandmother gather eggs, and watching my uncles milk the cows. My grandparents were very hard workers, and they definitely passed that value down to me. I learned, at a very young age, that it is important to work hard. A person can dream all they want, but if they are not willing to work hard, those dreams will never become realities.

While my family was the source of many of my good habits, my love for people of all races, which started at a very young age, must have been a gift from God. Love for diverse cultures and people was definitely not something that I always saw in my extended family or in the people around me. Dalhart was in the South. And I grew up during an era of extreme racial prejudice and discrimination. In fact, some of my relatives were very negative about black people, and their attitude bothered me a lot. Even as a child, I would get outright angry about racial discrimination; I didn't understand it or like it. I loved all people, but that made me appear as a troublemaker in the eyes of my relatives. My uncles would laugh at me and make fun of the way I felt. Their ridicule might have hurt my feelings, but it didn't change me. God had given me a love for all people, and it didn't matter to me if others made fun of me because of it.

When I was about five years old, my father got a new job that took us to San Angelo, Texas. It was hard saying goodbye to Dalhart because it was all I had known up to that point. I was nervous about leaving behind the familiar, and venturing into that which was new and different. We moved just before my first year of school began. At that time, San Angelo didn't have a kindergarten class, so I started first grade. I had such a great desire to excel and a fear of not doing well that I was easily overwhelmed. During those overwhelming times, my mother was an immense support to me. I would complain, "Mom, on Friday there is a spelling test, and I don't know what to do!" Mother's response was always the same, "You were a smart baby; you will do well." Her response to me was reassuring and gave me courage. It did not matter what my fears were or how often I thought I might not do well academically; she would encourage me by saying, "You were a smart baby!" She was actually saying that since I had been smart when I was a baby, I was smart at that point, too! After a while, I began to believe it.

With my parents' encouragement, I did well in school. I liked the challenge, and I liked getting good grades because of how it made me feel. It was rewarding to get A's, and it made my father happy. My father, John Allen Sweitzer, was a very quiet man, but very caring. He would smile with joy if I got an A, and I loved that. His response to my good grades inspired me to put in my best effort. I wanted to please him, so I worked even harder to get A's.

As I went through grade school, my parents' German household rules were deeply instilled in me. We had three very specific rules: work hard, be disciplined, and learn to provide for yourself. And that's exactly how I lived. When I was 11 years old, I began buying my own clothes. One of my first jobs was gathering baskets of apples that had fallen off trees. I would work for hours to fill one basket. I got paid five cents per basket, so it was worth the hard work! I believe those rules, along with my family experiences as a young child, were instrumental in developing a resilience in me that lasted throughout my young and late adulthood. My childhood experiences taught me to never give up, even when things looked impossible.

My younger brother, David, was born shortly after we moved to San Angelo. While his birth brought joy to my family, I, unfortunately, was not particularly fond of him. This was true especially when he was very young. Since he was several years younger than me, I didn't feel like we could have any fun playing together. Yet, he always wanted to play with me, my friends, and my dolls. I wasn't interested in sharing my friends with him, and my dolls were totally "off-limits" because when he played with my dolls, he often broke them, which made me so unhappy with him. At first, I didn't quite understand the whole sibling thing. To me, he was just a pesky little brother. Fortunately, by the time I turned 11, I started to have a better relationship. I think he finally grew old enough that I could appreciate him, and we started enjoying our times together. David was much smarter than I was and performed better academically. He became an electrical engineer and did quite well. As adults, even though we lived in different states, he in Texas and I in Colorado, we remained close and talked often.

Unfortunately, David struggled with mental health issues most of his life. During his difficult years, my mother stood for his salvation: she prayed for him and believed that he would know that God loved him, that he would accept the truth that Jesus died for him and pray for Jesus to forgive him of his sins. My mother also prayed and asked God to fill David with the Holy Spirit. This is an experience talked about in the second chapter of Acts, where the followers of Jesus were filled with the Spirit of God and began to use the power of God operate through their lives. During his 60s, David received salvation and the filling of the Spirit. It happened in the late 1990s when he went to see my mother on her death bed. During that time, she prayed for him, and he was saved and filled with the Spirit. After that, he was mentally and emotionally healthy until his death in 2012. My mother had refused to give up on him, and that tenacity produced results. I know that she instilled that same perseverance in me, a determination to never give up until God gives me the victory, which has enabled me to see amazing breakthroughs in my life.

my dad was originally from Pennsylvania, but he had suffered from asthma when he was younger, so he moved to Texas because of the warm climate. At the beginning of World War II, when I was 10, we moved to Sewickley, Pennsylvania where my dad helped build ships as part of the war effort. My mom liked Pennsylvania. She thought the area was beautiful, and particularly refreshing with its countless variety of plants, flowers, and trees. She also loved that Pennsylvania had four true seasons, and she loved the gorgeous colors all around us when the leaves changed in the fall. We lived in Sewickley until after the war ended in 1945. Those years were very tough for everyone because of the war and the shortages that resulted from it. I remember planting victory gardens so we would at least have vegetables to eat. As I look back, I can see that even in the midst of the struggles, God was working to shape His purpose for my life. This work was most evident in my education, social development, and friendships.

### My First International Friend

Physically I had very good schools. The teachers were devoted and engaging, and that sparked a hunger in me for learning. I did well academically, but the larger impact on my development extended beyond the four walls of the classroom. Pennsylvania, even at that time, was much more diverse than Texas. In so many ways it was very cosmopolitan. There was a large international population, including many people who were Polish or Italian, which exposed me to people from various ethnicities and backgrounds. The different cultures and languages were intriguing to me, and I loved being able to socialize with people from different countries. I befriended several children in my class who were very different from me, and I loved it!

My first "international" friend was an Italian immigrant. Her name was Clorinda Flora. I really took to her and thought her accent was captivating. Before Clorinda, I had never met anyone from another country. I felt especially drawn to her. The attraction might have been because in many ways she was an outsider and I could identify with her. During that period of my life, I often felt isolated and lonely myself, and it was evident that neither Clorinda nor I were in the popular crowd. I liked the fact that we were different from each other, and I didn't mind being different from the others around us.

I enjoyed hearing Clorinda tell stories about her life in Italy and her adventures near the Mediterranean Sea. For a dreamer like me, to hit a gold mine. I would ponder her stories and wonder about life in Florence, Venice, and other parts of the world. Clorinda's family loved me, too. Whenever I visited her home, her family would cook authentic Italian food for me, which was so good! I loved hearing her family converse in their native Italian. I thought their conversations sounded so beautiful. Even though I was very young, my friendship with Clorinda taught me to appreciate the beauty of diversity. Our friendship grew throughout elementary school, as did my love of languages and desire to see the world.

### Connected to Him

At that time, I felt very drawn to God and wanted to be connected to Him, even though the denomination that I had been raised in was quite liberal and did not encourage much in the way of a personal relationship with the Lord. Despite that lack of encouragement, my heart was pulled in such a way that I felt like I needed to know more about God. One day, I prayed a simple prayer in my heart to Him; I said, "I want to be where You are. Where are You? Should I go to the Methodist church, or the Catholic church, or the Baptist church? I want to be where You are." He replied to my heart with a crystal-clear message. He said, "I am in the Word." That seemed strange at first, but it also made sense to my heart. Even though our church had not emphasized reading the Bible in personal devotions, my mother had always said the Bible was the Word of God and had all the answers. The example set by my mother and the clear message from God convinced me that I needed to read the Bible.

I began reading my Bible each day, and every night I knelt on the floor of my second-story bedroom and prayed the scriptures. Outside, there were several sturdy pine trees that seemed to shelter my mindfully. The beauty of the surroundings, together with the tranquility of prayer, made that a very peaceful place. Although I enjoyed those times immensely, I never had even an inkling that those actions were laying the foundation for my life's work and future success. The seemingly innocent love that had developed for the scriptures and prayer laid the foundation for a passionate, life-long discipline of Bible reading that literally changed the course of my life and shaped my destiny.

I don't understand why, but in the beginning, I loved reading the book of Isaiah. I read Isaiah all the time and began to take some of the promises from that book and actively believe for them to become a reality in my life. I also began to read the book of Psalms. Psalm 139 quickly became one of my favorites. Everyone should read and memorize Psalm 139. It teaches us that nobody is an accident and that everyone on this earth is a divine appointment. We are not always aware of the challenges and dangers ahead of us, but God is, and He will prepare and fortify us so that we can walk in His grace through those challenges.

### A Dark Time

Despite all the positive experiences that took place during my years in Pennsylvania and the wonderful truth I was learning from the Word of God, there was a very dark side to my life as well. It easily could have overshadowed all the joyful experiences, the friendships at school, and the deep spiritual work that was taking place in my life. Looking back, I believe I survived that dark time because of my deep foundation in the Word of God. In my heart, I knew that God loved me, even though my negative experience caused me to question that truth. Since then, I have learned that we are not always aware of the challenges and dangers ahead of us, but God is, and He will prepare and fortify us so that we can walk in His grace through those challenges.

My dark experience started when my family first moved to Pennsylvania. In the beginning, we lived with my aunt and uncle. Unknown to anyone else at that time, my uncle began sexually molesting me when I was only 11 years old. I didn't know the facts of life or really understand what he was doing, at the time. I only knew that I didn't like it. It confused me because when he wasn't sexually abusing me, he was very nice to me. In fact, he was nice to everyone. He was loved by so many people who thought he was the nicest person in the world. His popularity only added to my turmoil. After each incident of abuse, I felt ashamed and guilty, and blamed myself for what was happening. Because he was so well-liked by everyone, I felt that the abuse had to be my fault. I thought, if I weren't doing something wrong, this wouldn't be happening. It was a totally devastating and extremely confusing time in my life. Shortly after I turned 12, the abuse suddenly stopped, and we moved with me, and I wanted to end my life. I even tried to commit suicide. That entire year was intensely sad and extremely difficult. I thought I was completely alone. It felt as though God had abandoned me.

My emotional distress didn't begin to get better until I started the seventh grade. During that school year, I started receiving positive feedback because of my good grades and began to pull out of the devastating downward spiral. The encouragement that I received from my academic success pulled me out of depression. My accomplishments at school brought some initial healing and enabled me to take my eyes off the abuse and move forward.

As I excelled academically and as the years went by, I completely blocked all the memories of the sexual abuse. In fact, I completely forgot about it until many decades later. I was unaware of the devastating ways it had affected me over the years. But, when I was in my early 70s, more than 60 years after the abuse, I was infected with parasites during a ministry time in Kazakhstan. The parasites made me extremely ill; I lost 20 pounds and became very weak. Nine months went by before the doctors diagnosed the problem. In the meantime, I became weaker and weaker. My situation seemed hopeless because no one seemed to have any answers as to what was plaguing me. I had to cancel all my trips and speaking engagements. I shook all the time, trembling clear down to my bones. I became very depressed, was down physically and mentally, and didn't want to live.

At that time, I had some friends who were counselors, and they recognized the horrible, debilitating depression that had been plaguing me. They offered to meet at my house to pray for me. That prayer meeting was life-changing and life-saving! At the beginning of our time together, they prayed that the Holy Spirit would bring to my mind anything of which I needed to be aware. It was like a light bulb had been turned on and suddenly I remembered the abuse that had been hidden for decades. Until that moment, I had no idea that the sexual abuse I experienced early in life had never really been healed. But after we had prayed, God reminded me that for an entire year after the abuse had ended, over 60 years earlier, I had wanted to commit suicide.

God spoke to me and said, "You thought I abandoned you, but I was there the whole time." He showed me how He had stopped the abuse, taken me out of the situation, and given my family a different place to live. He also reminded me that I had been able to attend junior high school right after that, finishing at the very top of my class. I realized that God had been with me all along, leading me out of danger.

After I received that word from God, I cried for three days, my heart was healed, and joy returned. I was so happy to be alive! God had healed me when I didn't even know that I needed it. That healing experience radically changed me. After that night, I could help people more effectively. Prior to that healing experience, I wasn't very compassionate with people. If someone was having a hard day, I would feel like telling them, "Take a rubber band, put it around your head, and snap out of it!" I couldn't understand why they couldn't get their attitude and feelings lined up with the Word of God and "make themselves better." I didn't know how horribly wrong I was!

After God healed my heart and filled me with joy, I understood people's hurts so much better. I began to love the book of Ecclesiastes more than ever before. I could see many promises from Ecclesiastes coming to pass in my life. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time." And He did! For over 60 years, I had put the entire abuse experience out of my mind—it seemed as though it didn't even affect me. But God had not forgotten He. At the right time, He brought it back and said, "Now is the time for total healing." I realized that in many ways, I had carried on as if nothing had happened. I forgave my uncle and even went back to Pennsylvania for his funeral when he died of a heart attack. I spent that night with his wife, Aunt Ethel. She said the surgical part of me, the part that felt abandoned by God and wanted to die, had not been healed. That night, at a life-saving prayer meeting, God healed me. It was His perfect time! I learned that the real adventures and rewards were with people, and I made them my life's pursuit.

### God Uses People

As I look back over my childhood, I realize there were several people who made a profound impact on my life. The first was my Aunt Ethel. She had a way of making me feel like I was the most important person in her life. She did that for so many people. She was the most hospitable person I have ever known. If she had the means to do it, she would have fed the world. Where I grew up in Pennsylvania, the people could sometimes be snobbish, but Aunt Ethel was different. She always held her arms open for the needy. In fact, I remember two men in my neighborhood who needed help for their eyes, but no one cared about them because they appeared a little strange. They probably were, but that didn't stop my Aunt Ethel. She made soup for them and left it in an area where they could find it, so they always had something to eat. She was constantly willing to help in any way she could. I believe she inspired me to be more caring and generous toward others, especially the "untouchables" of society. God used her example to help me have a bigger heart for people: a heart that was moved with compassion and wasn't nervous about reaching out and offering a helping hand, even in the most desperate of situations. Many times, we have compassion for people but we don't do anything to help them because we are afraid. Aunt Ethel taught me that I had to do more than feel compassion; I had to do something to help.

Aunt Ethel was caring. She had a strong personality, with a very positive disposition and outlook on life. She was not afraid to take a stand. She was way ahead of her time in many respects. In an era when most women had accepted their roles as subservient to men, Aunt Ethel was a revolutionary. She didn't believe that women, because of their gender, had to have smaller ambitions than men. When I told her that I wanted to be a foreign ambassador, she said, "You can be anything you want to be." She would always tell me that God had given me a "strong mind." I never questioned her belief in it. So I took it in. In fact, she pushed me to master languages, especially Latin. It was from her encouragement that I developed a love for the romance languages. Yet, it was never just the languages; it was the people, places, and the nations represented that sparked in me a burning passion. From my aunt's example, I learned that the real adventures and rewards were with people, and I made them my life's pursuit.

I was in the seventh grade when I first took Latin. I had a wonderful Latin teacher, Mr. Hawes. He was a Harvard graduate, with an obvious love for Latin, who also loved to play chess. Latin was hard at the beginning, but I was determined. Mr. Hawes always pushed me to learn more and more. He would often make me cry because he worked me so hard. One day, he told me, "If you didn't have the ability, I wouldn't be pushing you." After that, I stopped being negative about how hard it was and just worked harder. Eventually, I fell in love with Latin. That experience with Mr. Hawes deepened my desire to learn other languages. So, I added French to my Latin courses, and eventually studied Spanish and Greek as well.

During my junior year of high school, at the age of 16, I was offered a scholarship to a Methodist summer camp in Junctionville, Pennsylvania. I was excited to go because it was a "camp," but I did not know that attending the camp would change me and set me on a different course—a better course for my life than I could have ever imagined. As I look back at that summer, I know it was a divine setup. We were at the camp for four days, and all the other girls in my dorm were different from me. They had something I didn't have, but I didn't know what it was. They talked to me about God all week. I learned more about God each day. On the last day, I had a life-changing encounter. The minister that evening was a Baptist youth pastor. At the end of his sermon, he asked, "Do you have Jesus in your heart?" It was the first time I had heard anyone mention that you could have Jesus live inside your heart. I thought, I don't. I know about Him, but I don't have Him inside. The minister then invited everyone who didn't have Jesus in their heart to come to the front. I thought, I love Him; I want Him. Without a second thought, I went up to the front and prayed a simple prayer to receive Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

### Transformation Through Jesus

The very moment that I received Jesus into my heart, I was transformed. For three days, I was so filled with love and joy that I wanted to hug the trees! When I got home from camp, my mother said, "I don't know what's wrong with you; you are so joyful!" I couldn't stay out of the Bible. I finally had the Author in my heart, and I desperately wanted to know Him more. For years, I had read the Bible, but suddenly something had changed. The Bible had become a person; it had become the "living Word of God" in my life. I knew that God had been drawing me closer to Himself for years but praying that prayer and asking Jesus to live inside of me as my Lord and Savior made all the difference in the world. That life-changing experience also marked the beginning of the supernatural work of God in me. I had so much to learn, but little by little I began to see God do miracles in my life. I was beginning to realize that God is a good heavenly Father, Who has wonderful blessings for His children.

Everything was wonderful. I read the Bible every day and grew stronger in my walk with the Lord. I was awed by His love, and full of joy and peace. As I enjoyed each moment of each day with Him, I didn't know that once again everything in my life was about to get upended. Big changes, and even bigger challenges, were directly ahead of me.

### Moving to Colorado

That fall, my father's asthma flared up. He had fought it many times in the past, but this time, the effects of the asthma were life-threatening. His doctors told us that we had to move somewhere where the air was healthier. It was at that time that we moved to Denver, Colorado. I was 16 and a junior in high school. I wasn't excited about attending a new school with new teachers and new kids, but I was determined to make the best of it. Even still, I wasn't prepared for the enormity of the change. In Pennsylvania, my high school had 400 students, but when we got to Denver, my new high school, South High, had over 2,000 students. There were more students in my junior class than there had been in my entire high school in Pennsylvania.

I felt completely lost in the crowd. I didn't know anyone in the school, and it seemed like everyone else knew each other well. Many of the kids had gone through years of school together, so I was definitely an "outsider." Not having many friends at school, especially at first, made the transition even more difficult. Fortunately, I had another great Latin teacher. Again, he motivated me to excel in and appreciate the language even more. His encouragement and my subsequent success in mastering languages helped me adjust to my school and new life in Colorado. It also prepared me for the amazing, supernatural future that God had planned for me.

By the time I graduated from high school, I had taken six years of Latin, several years of French and Spanish, and even some Greek! My desire to be a foreign ambassador had blossomed into a life-long career goal. I loved the thought of traveling and even living in other countries because I wanted to experience the uniqueness of the people and their cultures. As the question of college and further study came up, I was very confident of the direction I wanted to go. I had decided to go to a university and pursue a degree in foreign languages.

Years before I ever attended a university, when I told my dad that I wanted to go to college, he said, "Great, but I'm not paying for it. Get scholarships and work your way through." And that's what I was determined to do! I worked hard in high school to get good grades and earn scholarships. During my first year of college, I did have scholarships, but I also worked during the day, lived at home to save money, and attended night classes at the University of Colorado.

My first year of college was hard. It was difficult to take classes and work full-time, but it proved beneficial. I was able to save enough money to transfer to the University of Northern Colorado and live on campus for the last three years of college. I went home on weekends and worked at a clothing store to help cover the rest of the cost. I was able to finish college and further study without any debt. Of course, a university education was not as expensive then as it is now, but graduating debt-free is still quite a testimony to the faithfulness of God.

### My First Small Group Bible Study

College also introduced me to another avenue for spiritual formation that had a tremendous impact on my life. Each week I transferred to the University of Northern Colorado, I found that most of the girls in my dorm were Lutherans. They had a Bible study in the dorm each week. I had never heard of small group Bible studies before, so I intrigued them. I decided to join them and fell in love with that way of studying the Bible. The girls in the Bible study had such an impact on my life that I even attended their Lutheran confirmation classes. I was never officially confirmed, but despite not being an official Lutheran, I became the president of the Lutheran Student's Association at the University of Northern Colorado.

Looking back, I realize that those wonderful Bible study groups were much more than a group of young adults gathering to learn the Bible. God was definitely using them to equip me with a system for spiritual life development that I would need in the future. Over the years, Bible study groups became an integral part of my ministry. I am so grateful to God for the experiences I had with those girls, learning and growing together in our knowledge of God.

In 1953, I graduated with honors with a Bachelor of Arts in Collective Foreign Languages from the University of Northern Colorado and was immediately hired to teach Spanish and English at a high school in Pueblo, Colorado. I loved my job, enjoyed my students, and relished the day-to-day challenges of teaching, but I could not get away from my dream of being a foreign diplomat. I planned to get my master's degree, study French, Italian, or Spanish, and eventually become a foreign ambassador. I was 22 years old, and had my life planned out. Only later did I realize that God had a plan that was even better than mine.

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