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ON THE FAMILY

Welcome Home!

OUR FAMILY'S JOURNEY TO EXTREME JOY

Kimberley Woodhouse



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Welcome Home: Our Family's Journey to Extreme Joy
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Praise for *Welcome Home*

We all love stories of miracles: the sick get well and the lame walk—it’s done! Healed! Over! God showed up as God. But what about stories of triumph—stories where the healing doesn’t take place instantly, but God shows up moment by moment, day after day? We don’t always get the miracle we pray for, but we can have God’s strength and wisdom to triumph one day at a time.

Kim’s grandparents—Ray and Dot Frappier—and their children were with my husband, Jack, and me from the beginning of Precept Ministries International, where we learned to discover God’s Word and truth inductively. This book is a testimony of triumph that comes when you know God and His Word firsthand. In the Woodhouse story, the next generation shows how to live out truth, how to live “normally” in a difficult place. You’ll love it, and you’ll learn by example how to find joy. Isn’t that one of the Divine byproducts of trials?

—KAY ARTHUR, best-selling author and cofounder and co-Chief
Executive Officer of Precept Ministries International

Kimberley Woodhouse’s frank and warm narrative about her family’s rocky journey to extreme joy is a book to be reread and treasured, but make sure you have a tissue handy. I loved this book, and it was such an encouragement to me when I was dealing with my beloved father-in-law’s advancing Alzheimer’s. A book for the keeper shelf!

—COLLEEN COBLE, best-selling author
of the Rock Harbor series

Here's a story packed with encouragement and evidence of God's graciousness. Whatever your problems and pressures, the Woodhouse story will encourage you to keep trusting Him—and keep on keeping on.

—DON HAWKINS, DMin, President of Southeastern Bible College

My impression of *Welcome Home: Our Family's Journey to Extreme Joy* is exactly the same as my impression of this incredible woman who wrote their family story: amazing! Through their trials they (as the saying goes) became better, not bitter. They chose joy and have inspired me to look at the bumps along my own road as opportunities to rise and fly instead of moan and groan.

—DONITA K. PAUL, best-selling author
of the DragonKeeper Chronicles

I not only recommend this story of hope, but I am privileged to call the Woodhouse family our friends. Kim could have focused on the sorrow and pain of family events, but instead she writes about God's tenderness and mercy. Throughout their journey, this family could have chosen to quit—to give up, but they kept on going with the joy of the Lord as their strength. This book is for those who desire that same joy and hope for themselves.

—TRACIE PETERSON, best-selling author of over 80 books
including The Brides of Gallatin County series

Welcome Home presents a beautiful portrayal of a mother's love transcending all obstacles. Kim's words inspire us all to recall what really is important along this journey. I've had the pleasure of spending the day with the Woodhouse family—but if you can't, read this beautiful book and relish in the joy of coming home.

—GARY WRIGHT, Southern Living At Home

Dedicated to

Jeremy, Josh, and Kayla—

I love you with all my heart.

*You inspire me each and every day on this adventurous road we call life,
and you help me define my very own normal.*

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Foreword

My band and I were on the last leg of my first solo tour of the West Coast. We made our way from Tennessee to Amarillo, Texas, and then to Santa Fe, New Mexico. From there, we went to California and up the coast. After a few shows we began to make our way back home: Nevada, Utah, and then to Colorado. We had had some very memorable concerts, but one stuck out: Colorado Springs. It was an interesting night altogether. We were in a smaller venue than normal, and as a result, it was difficult for our production crew to load in and set up as they had planned. I was excited about Colorado Springs because I had only been there a couple of times. The city was a growing market for me, and that interested me a lot. But though the crowd was more than enthusiastic, it turned out to be a little smaller than anticipated. There were also some sound problems, and my voice was tired. Not one of my better nights.

After the concert I made my nightly trek to the merchandise table to shake hands with fans and take photos. After I signed the first few autographs, I talked with a young couple who had worked their way up to the front of the line. The guy said, “We just have to know . . . Why are you here?”

I paused for a moment, realizing that this would take more than a simple “Thank you.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

He went on, “Well, this is a really small place, and none of the other tours come here. They all come to the bigger hall on the other side of town.” Before I could speak, he added, “We just think you should be in the bigger venue.”

I smiled, knowing that this was a compliment, but also to cover up

my disappointment that we couldn't even fill the smaller venue. "Thank you, but this is where God led us this time. We weren't able to schedule that hall when we could be here. Maybe next time we'll have better luck."

The couple smiled and expressed how much they enjoyed the evening, and then I moved on to the next person in line. I was tired, depressed, ready to go back to the bus. The line moved on. I was doing my best to spend a fair amount of time with each person and to be kind to those waiting.

"Thank you."

"Sure I'll sign it."

"Do you want me to make it out to someone?"

Why am I here? Why weren't there more people here? I hope no one was disappointed.

I don't remember her walking up. Actually, I must have still been thinking about the bigger venue because my memory of the encounter begins after she was into her story. I was concerned that she was taking too long with her story and that those behind her would become frustrated. But as I focused on her, something inside of me said, *Stop. Listen. This is why you're here.*

I remember I set my Sharpie down and relaxed against the table. The story unfolded. The room disappeared. It was a moment bigger than my agenda. I was caught up in it. I couldn't help but memorize her face. Tears. Anxiety. Joy.

The story, as you will read, was of her daughter, Kayla, a huge fan with a terrible burden—or was it a blessing? Her joy confused me. There were tears in my eyes and in hers. I struggled to keep up with her story, and before I could react, she was saying good-bye and rushing out the door. I looked into the eyes of the next person in line.

After a moment I said, “Will you wait one moment, please?” I turned to my assistant and quickly got his attention. “Please go after her and find out how I can contact her.”

That night in the front lounge of the bus, I told everyone the story of Kayla and the Woodhouse family, about her life-threatening condition, and about the miraculous hope on the horizon. The night was a success. Had I been in the bigger venue, it might have all passed me by.

An amazing journey started for me that evening. Phone calls, letters, television shows. A relationship started that will last long after this body gives out.

Rewind five years . . . or was it six? The details are blurry. It was a hectic time. I was in a large arena that evening. The tour had been long, and one city often looked like the last. After a long night on stage and then meeting fans, I was making my way to the bus when I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned to see a woman in her early 60s. Out of breath, she gasped, “I’ve been trying to find you in here before they close the doors.” She caught her breath and then went on. “My granddaughter introduced me to your music. She was a huge fan of yours. She would stand in her room . . . (*tears began*) in her hospital room and sing ‘End of the Beginning,’ ‘My Child Is Coming Home,’ and ‘Virtuoso.’” The woman placed a photograph in my hand of a beautiful little girl singing to a teddy bear she was lifting in the air.

“She wanted so badly to meet you, but we weren’t able to catch you last time you were here. She died of leukemia this year.”

I was stunned.

“I want you to have this photo and to ask you one thing: please don’t forget her.”

I managed to whisper, “I won’t.”

In my home office, in my right-hand desk drawer, there rests a photo of a beautiful little girl. Each time I open that drawer, I fulfill my promise. I lift up the photo and speak to it: “Sweetheart, I have not forgotten.”

But I don’t remember her name. I missed the chance to learn from her struggle, to experience her joy. I missed a chance to know victory. I missed a chance to see God. I was in the bigger venue.

I tell you all this not to pull at your heartstrings but because I simply desire to reinforce the experience you are about to have as you read the story Kim has painstakingly journaled. As you traverse its lines, let it encourage you to rest in the small venues of your life. The Glory . . . the Light of Life, I have learned, is in those moments.

Reaching out to Kayla has not commandeered my life. It has not depleted my time, emotions, or energy. It has not infringed upon my space. It has expanded the boundaries of my world, my influence, and my joy.

Listen to the soul stories around you in the seemingly insignificant moments. Take in the depth of their emotion and make their loss, their pain, and their victories your own. Use this chronicle of inspiration as your catalyst to pour yourself into the thirsty lives around you. And in doing so, each of us might just be able to follow the lead of the Woodhouse clan and discover laughter from tears, joy from pain, insight from confusion, and victory from victimhood. Now that’s an extreme makeover.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Phelps". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "D" and "P".

David Phelps
Recording Artist and Songwriter

Acknowledgments

My Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ—whose grace, love, and forgiveness give me a second chance every day. To God be the glory.

Jeremy—my husband and best friend. I love you. It hasn't been easy, but we wouldn't have grown so much. Thanks for encouraging me and sticking with me on this incredible, joy-filled journey.

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To NASA—I wish I could meet each person who had a hand in developing the cooling equipment that changes our lives every day. Thank you for giving Kayla some “outside” time.

For the tens of thousands of people who have contacted me through my Web site—Thank you for caring and sharing our story with others.

And to all my readers, I pray the Lord blesses you through the journey to joy.

And lastly, to the wonderful city of Colorado Springs—The entire community helped build us a home and gave us its friendship and love. God bless you!

Introduction

Life is full of surprises.

What I thought would be a simple outing turned into an incident with a rolling ice chest, a couple of armed security agents, and what they believed might be dynamite. Yep, that's me and my normal everyday life.

This particular adventure started as my family went through a Transportation Security Administration (TSA) checkpoint at the Colorado Springs Airport. As we waited on the far side of the metal detectors and scanners for our items to roll through on the conveyor belt, the line stalled. I grabbed my shoes, coat, and camera bag and then helped the kids get their backpacks. But the conveyor belt refused to cough up the rest of our belongings. The serious, unblinking, highly trained—and did I mention *armed?*—security guards moved the rest of my fellow travelers to another scanning station.

The scanner must not be working, I thought. Or I bet someone's in big trouble. I casually glanced around to see who looked suspicious and capable of having illegal items in their carry-on luggage. There's a troublemaker in every bunch.

A moment later the truth hit me in the face. *I am the bad guy.* I swallowed loudly. *I am the troublemaker.*

The armed agents were concerned with one particular item. They ran it through the scanner again. And again. Finally a TSA agent walked toward me with the problem in his gloved hands. "Is this yours?"

There it was. The ice chest containing my daughter's cooling packets for her vest.

"Yes, sir," I replied, reaching to relieve him of it.

“Ma’am, don’t touch the bag. We’re going to have to detain you and check this out.” He looked stressed. And unhappy. And he had a gun.

Everyone in the waiting area stared at me as if I wore a neon sign flashing, “Over here! Look at me!”

My ever-faithful, don’t-put-me-in-the-spotlight husband took the children and found a seat. Quietly. And *away* from me. The kiddos whispered their questions to their daddy as they waited to see the outcome of Mom versus the armed men.

More agents arrived, and the “item” was swiped with some magic cloth. I pondered my situation. *This can’t be good. The one in front looks like he wants to arrest me, and that one over there looks as if he wants to shoot me.*

My heart stuttered when I heard the words “possible bomb” a few times. Gulping down my impulse to try and explain, I attempted to look nonchalant. And nonsuspicious.

They were still discussing me when one TSA agent glanced at me, looked back down, and then with lightning speed, his head popped back up as his eyes grew in size and lit with recognition. “Hey, aren’t you the *Extreme Makeover* lady?”

Whew! I’d never been so thankful someone recognized me from TV. They knew who I was, they knew my story, and finally they knew *why* I was carrying an ice chest onto a plane. Things made sense to them now. I was allowed to explain my unusual carry-on, and a smile slowly appeared on each of their faces as they sighed in relief.

One man walked over, shook my hand, and told me how much he loved our show. Another apologized for the delay and then advised me that on our return trip from New York City, I might want to warn airport security about the ice chest *before* it went through the scanner.

The combination of the ice chest, plugs, cords, and cooling packets—

which look similar to a certain packaging of dynamite, I'm told—made them all wonder if I was going to blow up the plane. Wow! No wonder Captain Security looked as if he was ready to take me down!

Yep, my life is full of surprises.

The doozy was finding out that my daughter has an exceptionally rare nerve disorder called hereditary sensory autonomic neuropathy (HSAN). (Try saying *that* five times fast!) Kayla doesn't sweat or feel pain, and she had brain surgery two years ago.

My family's story has been all over the newspapers, in magazines, and on national television. And during all of these appearances and interviews, there's been a common hurdle I've had to jump.

That hurdle has been the subject of normality.

Would you like to guess which question the media asks me the most? "Will Kayla ever have a chance at a normal life?"

Let me tell you right now, I'm quick to share that God made Kayla just the way she is, and she has an abundant, overflowing life ahead. But it's not like everyone else's normal.

Do you ever get tired of hearing the word *normal*? I know I sure do.

"It's just *normal* everyday life . . ."

"Can't you pick a *normal* color?"

"She looks *normal* to me."

There's even a *normal* heading choice at the top of my screen as I type this. So, obviously, Microsoft Word has some sense of normality.

What is normal, anyway? And how on earth are we supposed to achieve it? "Normal," according to the eleventh edition of *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, is defined as follows:

- conforming to a type, standard, or regular pattern
- occurring naturally

- of, relating to, or characterized by average intelligence or development
- free from mental disorder

Okay, let's tackle these definitions. Do you think you conform to a type, standard, or regular pattern? I know I sure don't!

What about occurring naturally? Yes, I occurred naturally. You?

Average intelligence or development? Please, I don't know anyone who wants to be average.

Let's move on. Free from mental disorder. Hmm. Think about that one for a moment. Do we really want to address whether or not our minds are in order? Our thoughts? Mine tend to scatter on a daily basis. No comments, please.

Why do we feel this great need to fit in to a predetermined definition of normal? And why do we try to fit others into *our* normal?

Let me share with you what I've discovered in my ever-present quest to jump that mountain-sized hurdle of normality. I learned a long time ago that my life would never be anyone else's "normal," and I'm okay with that.

In the midst of everyday life, we all have complications. Some are mild, but some are so astronomically large, you begin to wonder, "How on earth am I supposed to survive this?"

In living this incredibly difficult yet inspiring journey, I have learned how to grab on to joy in every situation. Did you know that joy is not the same as happiness? Happy is in the dictionary as well as unhappy, but have you ever tried to look up unjoy? There isn't one. Why? Because even when you are sad, God's joy is still there. Even when life has you at the end of your rope, God's joy is still there. It can't be taken away. Let me put it this way—happiness is a feeling, but joy is more than a fleeting feeling;

it's the source. It's what I call my "normal-o-meter." When people ask me how I keep smiling, my answer is joy.

Now, I'm not a psychologist, a counselor, or a doctor of any kind. I'm *me*. I'm a wife and a mom. I've tried, and more often than I would like, I've failed. Miserably.

And, are you ready for this revelation? I am *not* perfect!

I am, however, perfectly normal.

Did you read that? You're probably wondering how on earth I could make that statement after examining *Webster's* definition. But hold on. In coming up with my normal-o-meter, I also had to redefine *normal*.

So here it is. *Normal* defined by Kimberley Woodhouse: "The unusual standard—it is irregularly patterned, nonaverage, occurring chaotically, and full of mental liveliness and creative flow."

You see, my house is a chilly 64 degrees year-round. You need a coat, a scarf, and woolly slippers to survive in it. All our friends have to come to our house, so they just bring their winter gear, even in July. I don't take my children many places because my daughter doesn't sweat or feel pain and has incredibly severe allergies.

It's my life, and it's my normal.

God gave you the same thing, a perfectly normal-to-you life. Stop comparing it to the lives other people live or the life other people *think* you should live and move on with what you have been given. You have your very own normal-o-meter. So jump out of the box.

Who's with me?

“If Something’s Going to Happen, It’s Going to Happen to Kim”

When my husband, Jeremy, and I decided we were ready to start our family, I had no idea what lay ahead on the road we were about to travel. Most young couples dream of the happily-ever-after, smooth-and-straight, follow-your-dreams road. Had I known then about all the bumps on the road, I might have quit and run away. But thankfully, I am *not* in charge, and I had to take it all one step at a time.

The first step toward parenthood took a year. After I had several miscarriages, the doctor decided to correct a minor problem through surgery. He thought this procedure would increase my chances of being able to carry a baby full term.

I was sitting on the table, ready to be put under for the surgery. The doctor told me he would be “right back.” He and the nurse rushed out of the room. The whole situation had already been an emotional roller coaster for me, so I didn’t handle those words with patience, or logic, for that matter. I sat there in a paper dress and thought, *I’m going to die. They found something and don’t know how to break it to me. I bet I have cancer. Or maybe I’ll never have children.*

I knew they were discussing whatever they just discovered, and rather than holding on to my faith, I created all sorts of horrendous diagnoses in my brain. That's one of the downfalls of being a creative person. We can't turn off the wheels in our brains, and we can imagine just about anything and be quite dramatic about the whole process.

While I contemplated how I would break the devastating news to my husband, the doctor returned, smiling. "You're not having surgery today, Kim."

"I'm not?" *Oh, boy. Here it comes. He's trying to soften the blow.*

"No. You're not. You're pregnant."

My mind ignored him as my thoughts continued their depressing track and ping-ponged around in my head. *I knew it. I need to ask how much time I have left. I need to be strong . . .*

Wait a minute . . . Did he just say pregnant?

The shock must have registered on my face because he repeated the news.

Instead of feeling excitement, I cried.

I knew I only had a 50-50 chance of carrying that child without the surgery, and so I was afraid. Afraid to get excited. Afraid I would lose another baby. Afraid to live my life with God's pure joy.

That fear almost swallowed me whole—until the nurse put her hand on my shoulder. And I saw tears in my doctor's eyes. They had been through the trenches of grief with me several times. They knew the risks. They knew the statistics. But they also knew Who was in control. They wanted to share the blessing of life with me.

In that brief moment, the first seed of hope began to take root. The doctor looked at me with kindness and reminded me where my treasures needed to be stored. The root system grew deeper, and I could feel optimism blossoming inside me.

“One day at a time,” he said.

I nodded and smiled through my tears. Yes. We were going to take it one day at a time. I realized I had been holding on to my burdens, the loss of those other children. And doing that had almost drowned me in a pit of despair. So I released the grief and handed the sadness over to the Lord.

After that moment, the visit rushed by. The doctor and nurse inundated me with instructions and information. I was high risk. I would have to come back every other day to give blood. They warned me not to do much of anything active.

I got dressed and prepared to leave. With a stack of paperwork in hand, I thanked the staff and started out the door to meet Jeremy. There was a tug on my arm, and I turned to see the nurse. With tears in her eyes, she hugged me and slipped a small piece of paper into my hand. Once I had greeted Jeremy and settled in the car, I opened the note. A Bible verse: “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (James 1:2–4). The words were familiar but had never touched me like they did that day.

And the journey to joy began.

“Morning” Sickness and Dr. Pepper

During the time we were taking our first steps to becoming parents, Jeremy was taking steps in his career and had taken a new job. Just days before I found out I was pregnant, he had packed all of our belongings into a moving truck and had driven it eight hours across three states from Birmingham, Alabama, to Moss Bluff, Louisiana. He unloaded the truck into our little one-bedroom rental house and drove back to Birmingham to get me.

Six weeks later, I had lost 24 pounds. My arms were black and blue from having my blood drawn. And I definitely did *not* have the “pregnant glow.”

I longed for someone—*anyone*—to say, “Oh, don’t you just glow!” instead of, “Wow, are you okay? You don’t look so good.”

Whoever gave it the name “morning” sickness needed to hang out with me for a while. It was morning, afternoon, evening, all night, 24-hour-a-day sickness. Green was my new color.

My dear Jeremy didn’t know how to help me. I hid in the bathroom with a towel over my face so he could eat and I wouldn’t have to smell anything. He routinely asked me if there was anything he could do, but I was still sick. All the time.

We went on the best we could. He worried about me, and I tried not to look like death warmed over. My poor little piano and voice students knew that if I jumped up quickly, they’d better clear a path in case I didn’t make it to the toilet in time. They would play easy songs like “Old MacDonald,” “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star,” or “Just as I Am” as fast and as loud as they could, because I wasn’t there to correct their sloppy mistakes.

That was in some small way refreshingly comical. But my first visit to my new doctor was nothing to laugh about. He told me either the baby or I would not survive. He suggested terminating the pregnancy and even asked me whether my life was worth risking for a “fetus.”

I was ticked.

He tried to convince me that my odds weren’t good. But I wouldn’t hear it.

“Life is not mine to give or take,” I spoke through clenched teeth. “And it’s not for you to decide either. That’s God’s job, and I’m completely offended that you would even suggest such a thing.” I opened the door to leave the conference room, but I had something else to say. Looking

over my shoulder at him, I spoke calmly, “And just so you understand, it’s a *baby*—with a heartbeat and arms and legs, and everything else you showed me in the pictures—it’s a b-a-b-y.”

Then I walked out of his office.

I had no idea how to find another doctor, especially when we had no insurance. Jeremy’s new job had started just days after I found out I was pregnant. The old job had great medical benefits. New job plus preexisting pregnancy equals no insurance. Oh, boy.

Jeremy didn’t make a whole lot of money teaching Bible at a Christian high school, so I knew it was time to look for help. Soon after, I found a wonderful doctor—Dr. Chesterton—through a friend at church. He helped us apply for Medicaid and for a national health-assistance program for women, infants, and children called WIC. And he never once suggested taking the life of our baby. He knew the risks, he knew the statistics, and he knew where Jeremy and I stood on that issue. Because he stood in the same place.

On our second visit, Dr. Chesterton asked me how much food I had kept down. When I informed him I couldn’t eat anything at all without getting sick, that wonderful man sent Jeremy to the store to buy every kind of carbonated beverage that existed. He told Jeremy there had to be *something* I could keep down that didn’t have too much caffeine. Jeremy went off to search for something to help.

Dr. Pepper won the prize.

It’s always been my favorite, although we never kept it in the house because it was reserved for special occasions. But when I discovered I could drink Dr. Pepper and not get sick, it became a staple. My students would bring me get-well notes and cases of soda. Forget the pickles, ice cream, nachos, and whatever else pregnant women crave. Our pantry was filled with cans of DP.

Even though I could now keep something down, I was still ill. The doctor was concerned I would deliver a premature baby, so we had to be prepared for delivery from week 20 on. Each visit the doctor would say, “Okay, let’s try to make it another week.” This stress seemed to make the last four months stretch into years. I swelled up like a balloon, “tossed my cookies” dozens of times a day, but I kept thinking, *One more day, one more week. Let’s give this baby every chance we can.*

Jeremy taught Bible and coached basketball and baseball at the high school. He’d leave home at 6:30 in the morning, teach all day, and coach all afternoon, sometimes into the night. Traveling to out-of-district games took up even more of his time, and there were nights the team would return after midnight. My hardworking husband would call me after the last kid was picked up, and then he would head home. Despite his long work hours and resulting lack of sleep, he helped me prepare for the coming of our child. We cleaned, assembled various baby equipment “essentials,” and laughed together. The bags were packed for my hospital visit, and everything was in place. And we waited.

I had begun to think Josh would never be born, and I would forever be the size of the Goodyear Blimp. (Even though I couldn’t eat much at all, I was bloated by water weight.) But wouldn’t you know? Josh surprised us all—my first miracle baby—and he was almost right on schedule, making his appearance March 29, 1995.

Pregnant, Again

Josh was the healthiest baby ever. (Well, of course we were biased, and the pediatrician was a little biased as well.) Roly-poly, happy, never-met-a-stranger, smiling Josh. Everywhere we went I heard, “Aww, he’s soooo cute!” “You should sign him up to be a baby model!” “Look at that cute smile . . .”

Life was good. I had my wonderful (and incredibly cute) husband, my bouncing baby boy, and my fun music students. It was easy to be joyful.

And then when Josh was 15 months old, a joy-challenging trial came that would be the first of many: my grandfather collapsed in his home. We spent a lot of time on the road that summer visiting Granddaddy. It was on one of those trips that I began to feel nauseous and then sick. Really sick. Jeremy took one look at me and joked, “I’ve seen that face before; you must be pregnant.” I didn’t find it funny when I was losing my lunch, but my sweet husband was correct. I took a pregnancy test the next day, and it immediately registered positive.

The joy of a new life growing within me was, for a short time, overshadowed by grief. A few weeks later Granddaddy passed away to be with the Lord. My grandparents had been married almost 70 years. The memories and emptiness in my soul overwhelmed and devastated me.

Because of the surgery that *didn’t* happen, I was in another high-risk pregnancy situation. Not long after Granddaddy’s funeral, I was so drained from the pregnancy-induced illness that I couldn’t even stand up. I would lie in the middle of the floor so I could at least “play” with Josh. In other words, I could still watch him as he toddled around and built things on top of me. With each passing day I became weaker. One afternoon Jeremy came home from work and found me passed out on the bathroom floor. Josh was safely napping, and we were thankful for that. But it scared us to think of what could have happened.

As Jeremy drove me to the doctor, we prayed for the tiny life inside of me and also for Josh. He didn’t understand why Mommy was so sad and sick.

In the exam room Dr. Chesterton, who was grinning like a jack-o’-lantern, delivered the news that I was going to be admitted to the hospital.

Jeremy squeezed my hand for reassurance. I asked the obstetrician why he was smiling as he dished out news I didn't want to hear—I was feisty and didn't want to be confined. My pride told me I would do fine on my own, thank you very much.

He laughed at me and said, “Kim, you're not superwoman.”

While I definitely understood I was *not* superwoman and most assuredly would not fit into the costume required for that job, I still didn't want to be told I needed to stay in the hospital. It simply wasn't part of my plan. And for some strange reason, I was thinking only of my own plan, not God's. It was a lesson I would have to learn the hard way.

The Hospital Disaster

So, hospital stay number one: Doctors pumped me full of fluids and medication via intravenous drip (IV). I went home. Became even sicker.

Hospital stay number two: Doctors pumped me full of fluids and medication via IV. I went home. Became even sicker.

Hospital stay number three: Doctors pumped me full of fluids and medication via IV. They made me eat red Jell-O. I told the nurse I didn't feel well. She didn't believe me. I threw up on her.

I have never been more embarrassed or upset—but she listened to me after that. I went home. Became even sicker. Though “sicker” doesn't quite seem to cover it.

Hospital stay number four: Doctors pumped me full of fluids and medication via IV. (Is anyone seeing a pattern here?) They did *not* give me red Jell-O. Instead, a stomach-settling drink they called “nausea malt” was on their list, along with some new medicine they were certain would work. Several nurses came by to see how I was doing. But the poor nurse who had to change clothes because of our prior meeting stood in the

doorway, hesitant to enter. She was watching. Waiting. Worried I wouldn’t make it past the first few sips.

“It’s good,” I told her. “I mean, it actually tastes good!”

Applause echoed all around me. I kept something down! And there was much rejoicing.

Excitement reigned in the halls that night as they put in a new IV with the miraculous medication that kept me from throwing up. I was resting comfortably, looking forward to a night without “the bucket.”

Around midnight, groggy and in pain, I pressed the call button to summon the night nurse. Our conversation on the intercom went something like this:

NURSE: Yes?

ME: My arm hurts.

NURSE: Yes, ma’am.

ME (confused): My arm really hurts.

NURSE: IVs hurt, ma’am.

ME (feeling neglected): Um, I’ve had lots of IVs, and it’s never felt like this.

NURSE: I suggest you go back to sleep, ma’am. IVs often hurt.

Click. End of conversation.

Enter Kim’s temper. It’s not a pretty thing, and I’m ashamed to say I was too tired to think straight. I was weak, had three IVs in me, and my arm *hurt*. I hit the call button again.

NURSE (in an agitated voice): Yes, ma’am.

ME: My arm really hurts. I can’t move it. I can’t bend my fingers. It’s dark in here, so I can’t see what’s wrong with it.

NURSE: IVs often hurt.

ME: I understood you the first time you told me. But I’m trying to

tell you it's hurting in an unusual way, and I need help. If you won't come look at it, would you at least send someone to turn the light on for me?

NURSE (audible huff): We change shifts in 15 minutes. You'll have to wait until the new nurse comes in.

Click. End of conversation.

At that moment I realized this poor woman considered me a pain. I didn't know what things were going on in her life to make tending her patients so distasteful, but a dehydrated pregnant woman complaining of a hurting arm did not rank high on her priority list. I felt really sorry for her and decided to pray for her.

Before I knew it, a new nurse came bouncing in. How anyone could be so energetic in the middle of the night was beyond me, but she was wonderful.

NURSE NO. 2: Do you need anything, Mrs. Woodhouse?

ME: My arm hurts. I called the other nurse, but she told me IVs often hurt.

NURSE NO. 2: Oh, my, let me turn the lights on. Is that all right?

Such courtesy.

ME: It's actually hurting worse. I'm a little worried.

NURSE NO. 2: (*Gasp!*) Oh no! (She hits a button on the wall that sends people flying into my room.)

ME: (Looking down, I see that my hand looks like a surgical glove blown up into a balloon. And my forearm is about three times the normal size.) Wow. No wonder it hurts.

NURSE NO. 2: Oh, hon, I'm so sorry we didn't take care of this earlier.

ME (giggling): It's okay. At least I'm not throwing up on anybody.

Laughter, glorious laughter was all I heard from the other nurses as they worked on my arm.

Another Reminder

Come to find out, one of my IVs wasn’t in the vein it was supposed to be in. So all that wonderful fluid and medicine had filled up my arm and hand. Jeremy’s words came to mind: “If something’s going to happen, it’s going to happen to Kim.” And I laughed.

As Jeremy escorted me out of the hospital one more time, a bubbly nurse came up to me and slipped a card into my hand. The whole floor of nurses had signed their names and written notes of encouragement. The nurse who handed me the card smiled sweetly and told me they thought I needed a little pick-me-up. I read their heartfelt words and cried. Can you guess which verses were written at the bottom? James 1:2–4. Hmm. Maybe there was something I needed to learn.

The thing was, it hadn’t sunk in yet.

I thought about all the wonderful people God had surrounded us with during these crazy times. No matter where we’d been, God had provided a community of encouragers, helpers, and friends. I taped the nurses’ card to the fridge to remind me to count my blessings and be joyful through the tough times.

I wouldn’t be able to use my right arm for more than six weeks. My poor husband, who loved my long, waist-length hair, had to help me wash it. He kept me laughing about the amount of shampoo he used compared to the “half a bottle” it took to wash mine.

I never stopped getting sick, but the new medication helped a lot. Being restricted in activity, I spent even more time in Bible study, and the book of James kept calling me.

Gasping for Life

Just before Christmas I was six months pregnant and having difficulty sleeping. I moved to the living room to read a book so I wouldn’t wake

Jeremy with my tossing and turning. A loud noise was coming from Josh's room, so I waddled over to the baby monitor, mumbling under my breath, "That stinker! He's playing in his crib."

As I cranked up the volume on the monitor, I realized Josh wasn't playing—he was struggling to breathe. I raced to Josh's room, with Jeremy following on my heels. The awful croaking became faster and faster as our 21-month-old gasped for oxygen. His lips were blue, and he looked up at me in panic. His expression pleaded with me to fix it, and then exhaustion swept over him as his eyes turned glassy.

I checked his airway—nothing was stuck in there.

Time was of the essence. I picked up Josh and headed to the car while Jeremy made a dash to our room for his car keys. The reality of living a good 35 minutes from a hospital hit me hard. An ambulance would never make it out to us in time.

Gingerly climbing into our little car, I gently held Josh in my arms and strapped the seat belt around us. I tried to calm him down by rubbing his back so that maybe, just maybe, the breaths would come a little easier. The whole time I prayed, "Lord, I know he's Yours, I just wanted to have him a little longer. Take care of our little Josh, please help him be able to breathe." Tears streamed down my face as I sang and then whispered to Joshua that we loved him, and he needed to relax.

The only highway into town was under construction, and to this day, I have no idea how we got there—in *12 minutes*. Jeremy was flashing the car lights, honking the horn, and people pulled over to the shoulder to let us pass on the narrow country road. I'm convinced there were angels guiding us that night.

The emergency-room doctors were amazing. We had a panicking baby on our hands, which was making his airway constrict even more. I held him while doctors worked a mask over Josh's face and Jeremy talked

to him in a soothing voice. As long as he had ahold of me and could see his daddy, Josh calmed down.

Jeremy’s parents and our pastor arrived, and we stood in a circle in the ER and prayed for Josh, who was still in my arms and had an oxygen mask covering his face. The medicine took a long time to take effect, but eventually his airway opened slightly, and Josh could take shallow breaths.

The doctor in charge pulled me over to the side to tell me that Josh had acute croup. Normally, toddlers of Josh’s age would be pretty sick from the croup, but it didn’t tend to shut off their airways. Concern was written all over his face as he explained that Josh had been mere seconds away from needing a tube inserted in his airway. Josh would be taken to the Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU), put in an oxygen tent, and monitored closely. They didn’t know why his airway had shut down or why it had happened so quickly.

Another problem was my fragile pregnancy. The doctor could tell the strain of the situation had taken its toll on me. He intuitively knew I was in pain from having contractions. I hadn’t thought about what I was feeling until he confronted me. As a new wave of pain washed over me, I sat down hard in the nearest chair, realizing my pregnancy was at risk.

The night was stressful, but medication and rest soon successfully stopped my contractions. I was joyful and relieved that Josh was able to breathe. As I slept on the pull-out couch in Josh’s PICU room, Jeremy climbed into the oxygen tent surrounding the hospital crib and kept vigil over our little boy.

Two days later, Josh was released from the hospital. We left with gratitude and loads of medication, but no answers as to why his airway swelled shut. The doctor told us to watch him closely. At the time nothing seemed worse than hearing your child gasp for air.

I have never slept the same since.

Grocery Trip Gone Bad

The day we returned home from the hospital, I received a phone call from the billing department. The account manager patiently explained that Medicaid covered bills for the new baby and me. And while Josh had been covered for the first year, he was now almost two, and so *he was no longer covered*. No coverage for the ER. No coverage for the PICU. No coverage for oxygen tents. Ouch.

The woman who called was supernice. I could tell she didn't enjoy giving me the news about the extent of our bill, but it was her job. I was as polite as possible and willed myself not to panic. The amount we owed was half a year's salary.

After I hung up the phone, I prayed, *Lord, You know the amount of that bill. You know we don't have any extra money. Thank You for saving little Josh's life. Thank You for the hospital being willing to work with us financially. Please guide us and direct us. Give us wisdom for the coming days.*

I knew it would be hard, and I felt the peace that only He can give. And I knew we'd do our best to pay off that bill as quickly as we could.

A couple of weeks later, my blood pressure dropped, and I swelled up like a balloon—two conditions that do not usually go together. Dr. Chesterton announced that the time had finally come for me to be confined to bed rest. I protested, but he just laughed at me again.

I went by the school where my husband taught and delivered the news. I wasn't supposed to lift Josh anymore. I wasn't allowed to feed him, change his diaper, play with him—not anything. Jeremy took in the information with seriousness and asked me point-blank why I was walking around the school. Ushering me out the door, he told me not to worry; he would take care of everything. He buckled Josh into the car seat, kissed me, and sent us on our way.

Home. That's where I was supposed to go, right?

But . . . I had planned to go to the grocery store after my appointment. I had a lengthy list and knew Jeremy wouldn’t have time after school, basketball practice, and the games they had that night. Plus, he had taken a second job as an interim youth pastor to help with the hospital expenses. His time was scarce. I ignored the advice of my husband and, worse, the still, small voice of God telling me to take care of myself.

Do you see where this is headed? I look back now and realize that my overorganized, list-making, itinerary-sticking personality led me right smack into the middle of trouble. I should always be on top of things, right? You know, like you’re supposed to *plan* for bed rest and get all your little ducks in a row.

Just as soon as everything got done, *then* I could follow the doctor’s orders. So I went grocery shopping. I know, I know, brilliant on my part. I had all kinds of excuses, like “Jeremy hasn’t ever used the WIC coupons, and I don’t want him to be embarrassed.” But I was letting pride color my thinking. I had been uncomfortable using them, thinking people were watching me. There were times I’d wanted to scream to the masses, “My husband has a job! He works *really* hard; he just doesn’t get paid much.” But I have to admit that *I* am the one who cares and worries about what people think. Jeremy doesn’t.

A couple of hours later, I had Josh down for a nap and was unloading all of the plastic bags when my husband called me.

“Are you all right? Where have you been?” Concern was evident in his voice.

“I’m okay.”

“Where have you been?” he asked again.

“Um . . .” The thought sunk in that this hadn’t been my smartest move. “At the grocery store.”

Silence.

Uh-oh.

He didn't have to say anything else. All of a sudden, I didn't feel so great. I glanced down at my feet and hands and saw they were twice the size they should be. Spots danced in front of my eyes. I barely made it to the couch before I passed out.

The next thing I knew, my husband was kneeling in front of me.

"What are you doing home?" I asked. "Don't you have to coach tonight?"

He gave me that I-can't-believe-you-could-ask-such-a-thing half smile. I knew he wasn't happy with me. After a quick hug, he explained I should be taking this seriously. The doctor was serious, and he was serious. He'd already called the church and had a list of people scheduled to come stay with me every day until he got home.

A knock sounded on the door, and I knew he was serious indeed. He'd already arranged for someone to be with me that night so he could coach his varsity boys in their last big tournament. A dear, sweet friend entered, and Jeremy kissed me good-bye, told me to behave, and drove all the way back into town.

My friend stood there, hands on her hips, tapping her foot. "Kim, if you don't beat all."

I looked up at her sheepishly.

"Jeremy told me what the doctor said, and then what you attempted this afternoon. Do you need a two-by-four upside your head?"

In an instant I knew she was right. I *did* need that. How could I have been so caught up in my own plans that I was willing to risk my life and the life of the child I was carrying? Was I really that selfish? Why did I ignore God's prompting to be safe? Good grief, I've been in the ministry all my life. I'm a pastor's kid, went to Bible college, married a pastor-teacher.

I’d really like to think I knew better. Ha! Well, I just proved that theory wrong.

Today I look back fondly upon that time. It was the beginning of a new path for me. Of course, God had been trying to prepare me before this, but it took a “two-by-four moment” to truly teach me the lesson.

And let me tell you, I’ve had a lot of those moments since.

Flying Shoes

Bed rest was not my most favorite thing. I studied my Bible, read books, wrote letters, and watched *VeggieTales* with Josh over and over and over again. I even finished a huge cross-stitch project. And after that? I counted all the stitches in that project: 523,612. Yep, I counted them. And that was all within the first two weeks. Only 10 more to go.

Women came to stay with me and help while I was confined to my horizontal position. Pretty soon, the biggest excitement of the day was going to the bathroom. And, yes, it was indeed something to get excited about. It was the only time I was granted the privilege of standing up, walking, and seeing a different area of the house. Wow.

The days blended together as we headed toward March. Josh was approaching his second birthday, and I was thankful he hadn’t had any more croup scares. I was swollen and huge, wondering if I would ever walk normally again instead of doing that interesting waddle. Late one afternoon I received a phone call.

The precious little church where Jeremy was working as interim had taken up a love offering for our hospital bill.

Guess how much they collected?

The exact amount owed. To the very penny.

Don’t try to tell me God isn’t cool.

My due date approached, and one afternoon the friend who was with me for the day had to leave before Jeremy got home. I truly intended to be good, but the whole nesting thing took over, and I couldn't sit still any longer. I made my way to unload the dishwasher. I was almost done when I turned around, and there stood my husband.

If it were possible for steam to come out of someone's ears, I'm sure I would have seen some that day. I was in trouble, and I knew it. I quickly walked back over to the couch and sat down. I started rambling about how good I'd been, that it had only been this once I'd gotten up for long, and I just couldn't help myself with all these crazy pregnancy hormones.

He laughed at me, but then looked down at my feet. My ankles were so huge, my thighs could have fit inside them. Literally. Putting his serious face back on, Jeremy appeared to be choosing his words carefully. I knew I deserved a stern lecture, and so I apologized. He asked me to please not put myself at risk again, and then he finished unloading the dishwasher.

That night I had a feeling I would have the baby the next day. I told Jeremy, and he made sure everything was ready.

And wouldn't you know, around lunchtime the following day, my water broke, and I was officially in labor. Jeremy's mom, Brenda, came to stay with Josh, and Jeremy drove me to the hospital. We were so excited about this hospital—we had toured it, preregistered, and informed everyone where we would be. The overorganized, list-making personality inside of me was content.

By the time I got to the delivery room, I was in intense labor. The nurses hooked me up to the monitors, the dial needles began to sway, and green lights blinked. Suddenly Dr. Chesterton discovered a slight glitch.

Remember the surgery that never was? I needed to have that taken care of right after this new baby was born. No problem, right? Wrong. I couldn’t have the surgery at that particular hospital. Why no one had thought of this before completely baffled me, but they gave me my options:

1. Have the baby at hospital A, go home, recover, have surgery six to eight weeks later at hospital B.
2. Leave hospital A in the middle of labor and go to hospital B. Have the baby and, immediately afterward, have the needed surgery.

It didn’t take long for me to decide that I didn’t want to recover twice with a toddler and a newborn. Jeremy agreed this was the best option, so in the midst of incredible labor, I somehow pulled my sweats back on, carried my shoes, waddled out the door, and climbed into the car.

As Jeremy pulled out of the hospital parking lot, he noted a minor problem: It was now five o’clock, and we were hitting traffic time. Oh, boy.

With Jeremy’s expert maneuvering and my increasingly faster and harder contractions adding urgency, the ride to hospital B was stressful, but we were alive. Jeremy escorted me to the front door and then raced off to park the car. I waddled to the front desk and explained my situation to the attendant. But for some odd reason, she wasn’t impressed with the fact I was in the last stages of labor. I told her our doctor had called ahead and was on his way.

“May I please check in and get to a delivery room?”

“Ma’am, you didn’t preregister at this hospital,” she answered, “so you will have to fill out the paperwork.”

“Can’t my husband fill out the paperwork?” I asked, breathing heavily.

“No, ma’am. *You* have to fill out the paperwork.”

My sarcastic retort was cut short by a huge contraction. I threw my

shoe at her desk just to make it through the pain. I could just imagine delivering a baby standing up in the lobby while I signed paperwork. I didn't realize how violent a woman in labor could be until I was in that predicament.

Thankfully, Jeremy ran through the doors at that moment and asked why on earth his wife was still standing in the lobby. The attendant tried her same little spiel on him, but he told her he wanted to see the hospital administrator right then and there.

Another contraction hit me, and I threw the other shoe, groaning through clenched teeth. Dr. Chesterton came running from the other direction and took charge. I'm thankful to say they got me into a room just in time. Kayla was born in a matter of minutes.

The rest of my hospital stay was amazing, and I'm so thankful we delivered Kayla there. And for those of you wondering, I know the woman at the front desk was just doing her job, but I must have scared her because I never found out what happened to my shoes.

Resources

David Phelps, www.davidphelps.com—David's official Web site.

Gift of Pain, www.gift-of-pain.org—The Gingras family started this foundation to help other children with the rare nerve disorder Kayla and Gabby both have.

Heat Relief Depot, www.heatreliefdepot.com—An extensive site that has an abundant supply of useful equipment for heating and cooling. Kayla's cooling vests and equipment all came from the Heat Relief Depot. Mention Kim Woodhouse or Kayla Woodhouse when you contact them. Phone: 1-877-879-1450

Kimberley Woodhouse, www.kimberleywoodhouse.com—Check out Kim's Web site to learn about other upcoming releases and to contact her.

Precept Ministries, www.precept.org—Precept Ministries' Web site offers a wealth of Bible studies and study aids. The Woodhouse family uses them extensively.

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Kimberley Woodhouse
Author/Speaker

Faith
PERSEVERANCE
Joy

Kimberley Woodhouse and her family were introduced to millions of TV viewers when they were featured on ABC's hit program *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. This followed years of front-page newspaper stories, national magazines articles, and medical journals. Since the ABC show aired, they have shared their story on *The Montel Williams Show*, Discovery Health Channel's *Mystery ER*, and hundreds of other media appearances.

A popular speaker, Kim has shared her quick wit, enthusiasm, and positive outlook through difficult circumstances in person, speaking to more than 600 churches, conferences, retreats, and seminars across the country.

As a third generation Liszt student, she has passed down her love of the arts to hundreds of students over the years and recorded three music albums.

She is a member of ACFW (American Christian Fiction Writers), the Vice President of the Colorado Springs Chapter, and active on the Colorado Area Board for ACFW. In addition to her non-fiction writing, she writes romantic suspense and children's books.

Kimberley lives, writes, and homeschools in Colorado with her husband and two children in their truly "extreme" home.

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