

Murder,
Motherhood,
and
Miraculous
Grace

a true story

DEBRA MOERKE

with Cindy Lambert
foreword by Carol Kent

Once you start reading this book, you will be gripped by its powerful and, at times, unbelievable story; you will not be able to put it down. I couldn't. By the time you finish, you will be gripped by the powerful grace of God. It's a story only God could write.

RUTH GRAHAM

Author of *Forgiving My Father, Forgiving Myself: An Invitation to the Miracle of Forgiveness*

Deb and Al Moerke wisely built their house and life on the rock of Jesus Christ. If I had known them at the time, I might have expected God to spare them the steady rain, threatening floods, and repeated battering by the winds of tragedy. They were not spared. Their story rocked and inspired me. *Murder, Motherhood, and Miraculous Grace* is, at its foundation, a story of the undeniable, unexplainable, palpable presence of God who empowers radical obedience and provides miraculous heart-change even when the tragedy remains.

SHAUNA LETELLIER

Author of *Remarkable Hope: When Jesus Revived Hope in Disappointed People*

Murder, Motherhood, and Miraculous Grace is a shocking story of surrender and redemption that will impact the lives of everyone who reads it. Moerke proves herself to be a master storyteller as she causes the reader to fall in love with little Hannah, which creates an intense roller-coaster ride of emotion throughout the rest of the narrative. Prepare for life disruption because this book is impossible to put down once the front cover is cracked. A must-read for fans of redemptive true-crime memoirs.

DARCIE J. GUDGER

Author of the Guarded Trilogy: *Spin, Toss, and Catch*

Like a single flickering light in the vast darkness, grace is best seen in the most unexpected places. Debra's story is not one of preservation, but of perseverance in the midst of unspeakable heartache—a grace that only God can give and a story only God can write.

KYLE IDLEMAN

Senior pastor, Southeast Christian Church; author of *Not a fan* and *Don't Give Up*

A terrific story with surprising twists. You will not be able to put it down. It will both break your heart and mend it as you marvel at the power of love to overcome.

ANN SPANGLER

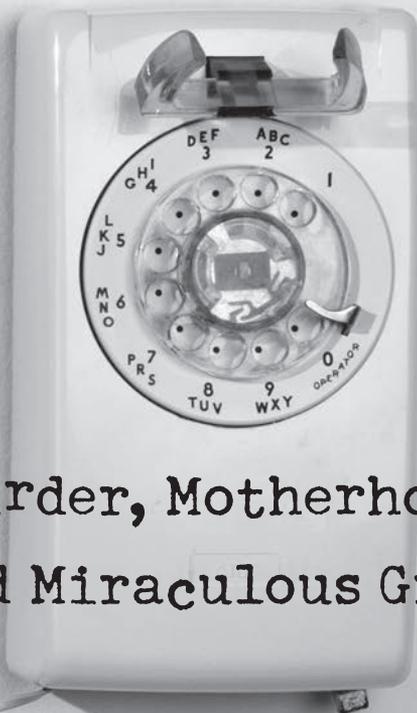
Author of *Women of the Bible*

What a powerful story that touched my heart deeply, moved me to tears, and enlarged my understanding of what surrender and God's amazing grace in action looks like. *Murder, Motherhood, and Miraculous Grace* is a must-read for foster families, adoptive families, birth families, social workers, judicial workers, or anyone who has endured loss of any kind and desires God to transform their pain into purpose. Thank you, Debra Moerke, for your authentic sharing and for opening yourself up to be a willing vessel to be the hands and feet of Jesus to reflect his love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace.

KATHE WUNNENBERG

Author/speaker; president/founder of Hopelifters Unlimited in Phoenix, Arizona





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DEBRA MOERKE

with Cindy Lambert

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In memory of my sister, Judy,
who not only led me to the Lord,
but was the first to encourage me to write this story.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under
trial because, having stood the test, that
person will receive the crown of life that
the Lord has promised to those who love him.

James 1:12

Contents

Foreword by Carol Kent *ix*

A Note to the Reader *xiii*

Prologue *xv*

part one: **The New Arrivals**

1. An Easy Yes *3*
2. The Home on Goose Egg Road *13*
3. Clues *27*
4. Inklings of the Past *37*
5. The Bridge *49*
6. The Parting *57*

part two: **The Unthinkable**

7. Suspicions *73*
8. The Pageant *87*
9. The Yellow Phone *101*
10. The Battleground *109*

part three: **The Fallout**

11. The Ultimate Question *125*
12. Unexpected Costs *133*

13. Sacred Conversations 145
14. The Decision 155
15. Unexpected Standoff 165
16. The Arrival 173
17. The Painted Stone 181
18. The Ruling 193
19. Obstacle Course 201

part four: Going the Distance

20. A Tender Hello 211
21. The Garage 217
22. The Witness Stand 225
23. New Territories 239
24. Boots and a Badge 251
25. Ticking Time Bomb 267
26. Roots 277
27. Freedom 287
28. The Revelation 295
29. Only God 305

Interview with Debra Moerke 319

Acknowledgments 325

About the Authors 327

Foreword

THE COVER OF THIS BOOK made my heart stand still. Almost twenty years ago my phone rang in the middle of the night. My only child, a US Naval Academy graduate with an impeccable record, had been arrested for the murder of his wife's first husband. I experienced the nausea, the inability to carry my own weight, and the disbelief that accompanies shocking, unexpected news. My head spun out of control with fear for my child's safety and the welfare of his wife and two stepdaughters. Questions about why a good God could allow such a horrific thing to happen, anxiety over how we would pay for his defense and make a living when the news became public, and sorrow for the family of the deceased surrounded me. One thing was certain: Life would never be the same.

There are defining markers in our lives that change everything. A shocking phone call. A baby—by birth or adoption. An incident that requires a demonstration of character. A devastating personal choice that results in incarceration. An unexpected health problem that brings suffering to someone we love. A crisis of faith when God seems to allow evil to triumph. A soul-stirring decision to help someone who has betrayed us. A willingness to forgive the unforgiveable.

Everything comes to a screeching halt and we feel like an outsider—someone living on the edge of reality, but not really being “in” it. Our thoughts are jumbled and conflicted:

*Surely what's just happened isn't real.
I will wake up and find out this was just a bad dream.
If this is truly reality, what am I supposed to do about it?
Could I have done anything to stop this bad thing from happening?
Is God asking me to be personally involved?
How will this impact my family?
How will I be judged by other people?*

It takes wisdom for us to fully understand what has taken place, what our role needs to be in the situation, and what God is prompting us to do that may be way outside our comfort zone or far removed from our human abilities.

Debra Moerke faced these challenges as she and her husband, Al, opened their home and their hearts to more than one hundred forty children over sixteen years. Believing she understood God's call on her life, Debra gladly embraced the challenges and pain these wounded children brought with them. Then something unthinkable happened to a precious child they cared for and loved—one they had hoped and prayed to protect.

The mystery of God's ways seemed too incomprehensible to grasp as gut-wrenching tragedy struck this family so dedicated to sharing God's love with powerless children. His ways became even more confounding for Debra when God called her to an even deeper obedience—a sacrificial obedience—that on a human level was impossible for her.

Stretched beyond what seemed the limits of her endurance, Debra took one step after another on this new path that required forgiveness, risk, and a reopening of her wounded heart that seemed unimaginable. Her story is not only about facing fears and fighting giants, not only about inconceivable forgiveness, and not only about the miracles that come with surrender, it's really about what only God can do. Too miraculous to be believed, yet true, the more one reads this story, the bigger God grows.

Throughout my own journey of my son's life-without-parole sentence, I'm learning that God often reveals his purpose through

the rearview mirror of time. Just when I think he's busy elsewhere and doesn't see my urgent need, I discover that he's answering my prayers in a different way than what I wanted or expected. Instead of an eventual end-of-sentence date for my son, God opened doors for ministry to inmates and their families through our nonprofit organization, Speak Up for Hope. Personal pain made me sensitive to the needs of others and more willing to give hands-on love and compassion to the families I'm getting to know in long prison visitation lines. I'm watching my son use his education, leadership, and Christianity to teach and mentor his fellow inmates. I, like Deb Moerke, am experiencing miraculous grace in the middle of harsh circumstances.

If you long to believe in love prevailing against all odds and you're ready to see God at work in circumstances that seem to deny his very existence, if you desire to witness the power of fierce forgiveness and you're open to being astonished at what only God can do, keep reading this book. You'll learn how to watch for God's light even in the darkest of times.

This book is Deb Moerke's true story of triumph. As you read *Murder, Motherhood, and Miraculous Grace*, ask yourself who you can encourage with a copy of this remarkable story. You'll be pointing people to an eternal perspective that reveals the blessings on the other side of obedience.

Carol Kent
Speaker and author of
When I Lay My Isaac Down
(NavPress)

A Note to the Reader

THE STORY YOU ARE ABOUT to read is true. Rather than relying on my memory alone, I dug into court transcripts and newspaper reports and interviewed a number of the people involved to ensure accuracy to the best of my ability. I am grateful to each person who participated in that process.

I value accuracy, honesty, and transparency, but I also value courtesy, privacy, and safety. That's why I was determined to find a way to tell my story without violating the privacy of some or putting others at risk of public exposure or danger. After all, this story includes foster children and the Department of Family Services, a murder and a trial, courtroom and prison scenes, and delicate circumstances.

I changed the names and disguised the identities of a number of people in the book as follows:

- Every child mentioned in the book has been given a pseudonym, including one of my own children. The others have given me permission to identify them by name.
- Every legal professional, every Department of Family Services employee, and every public official, if named at all, has been given a pseudonym.

- “Karen,” who played a major role in this story, has been given a pseudonym.
- “Karen’s” family, friends, associates, and a number of other individuals related to her have had their names changed as well.

Many people whose real names have been used have granted me permission to do so, for which I am grateful.

For private conversations and events that are not part of the public record, I have recreated them to the best of my ability, and I appreciate those who granted me permission to use their words. In some cases, I have made minor adjustments for the sake of the narrative flow, while preserving the integrity of the original text.

Debra Moerke

Prologue

“MOM, CAN I GO TO THE MALL with Katherine?”

It was a warm June morning, and Courtney’s 2012 summer vacation had just begun. The temperatures were climbing in Casper, Wyoming, but Alcova Lake would still be too frigid for water activities, so the most exciting social place for young teens to gather was at the local mall.

“Katherine’s mom will drop us off . . .”

“And I can pick you up,” I said. Now that Courtney was thirteen I allowed her to window-shop and eat lunch with her friends at the food court, unsupervised.

Later that day as I drove to pick up Courtney and Katherine from the mall, I thought a girls’ night out, with fast food and a movie, would interest my young teenage daughter. We’d had company to entertain the week before, and I thought we deserved a night for just the two of us.

The mall’s parking lot was jam-packed. I maneuvered the car to the main entrance where Courtney and I had agreed to meet. A small crowd of teens clustered near the door. Waving to get Courtney’s attention, I noticed a few new faces looking over and pointing toward me. The kids looked familiar.

And then it hit me. Weren’t they two of the Bower children? My heart skipped a beat. I couldn’t be certain. The last time I’d seen them was almost six years ago in front of our old house.

Despite my momentary unease, I kept smiling and signaling to Courtney. She finally found me in the line of cars and climbed into the front passenger seat of our SUV.

“Hi, honey! Did you have fun? Where’s Katherine?” I asked.

“Oh, her mom picked her up a few minutes ago. They were going out to dinner, so she left early.” Courtney’s voice was soft and her demeanor a little too subdued for someone who had just spent a few hours with friends.

“Who were the kids you were talking to?”

“Oh . . . just some kids. Some from school and others who live in Casper somewhere.” She buckled her seat belt and looked straight ahead. Something had happened. Something was said. I sensed it. My mind raced with fear.

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“I’m good. A little tired.”

Why isn’t Courtney looking at me?

“I thought we could get a bite to eat and then go to a movie since Dad is working late. Would you like that?” I thought my suggestion might perk her up.

“Yes! That sounds fun. Let’s do it,” she said, sounding more like herself.

After grabbing a burger, we picked a movie we both wanted to see. With popcorn and drinks in hand, we settled into our seats in the back row and waited for the movie to start. Then, out of nowhere, she said, “Mom, what are the names of my biological sisters and brothers?”

This time, my heart skipped two beats.

I knew for certain then. The two teens I had seen with her at the mall were Courtney’s biological siblings, Steven and Ally. They had grown up since I’d last seen them, but they looked much the same. Though caught off guard with the question, I answered her with another question. “Are you sure you want to stay at the movie now? We can leave and talk if you want.” Resting my popcorn bag on my lap, I looked directly at her.

She paused for a moment before answering. “No. Let’s talk after the movie.” At that, the lights dimmed, and a preview for an upcoming feature filled the screen.

All through the movie I thought about Courtney’s question and wondered if this would be the night she asked me to tell her the whole story behind her adoption.

She may think she is ready, but am I? I’m not sure I know how to tell her. I spent more time praying than paying attention to the movie.

The crescendo of orchestral music indicated the film had come to an end. The lights brightened, and I followed Courtney into the lobby and out the door of the theater. We said nothing to each other as we walked to the parking lot. Still not saying a word, we got into the car and buckled our seat belts.

“Well, did you like the movie?” I asked as I started the car.

Without warning, Courtney burst into tears. I threw my arms around her. “What’s going on?” I asked as I held her tightly.

“I’m . . . I’m just really . . .” She sobbed, trying to speak.

“Confused?” I finished her sentence.

“Yes.” She wept as if her heart were breaking.

Holding her tight, I whispered, “I think we should go home, get into our jammies, and sit on my bed and talk. What do you think?” I continued to hold her, waiting for her response.

Unable to speak, she nodded as she wiped tears from her eyes. As we headed home, I knew this would be a life-changing night. Was Courtney ready to hear the entire truth? Ready for the answers to all the questions she’d carried in her heart for so many years?

I wanted her to be able to see God’s light shining through her story, but she would first need to hear of the darkness.

Was I ready to tell her?



part one

The New Arrivals



chapter 1

An Easy Yes

DAYS THAT WILL CHANGE your life forever seldom announce themselves.

Only in retrospect can I see how one small yes on a warm June day in 1996 led to a flood of life choices and changes, of crushing pains and unearthly joys. Choices that would not only alter the makeup of our family, but push me above my limits and stretch my faith beyond recognition. I've learned never to underestimate what God will do with a yes.

I had a load of laundry in the washer and was in the kitchen, cleaning to the sounds of children drifting in from the family room, when the phone rang.

"Hi, Deb, this is Ellen." The social worker with the Department of Family Services (DFS) greeted me with her usual friendly tone. My husband, Al, and I had been foster parents for fourteen years and were on a first-name basis with nearly all the caseworkers.

"I know you are fostering two brothers who will be going home soon. Would you be able to take a four-day-old infant, too? The mother is still in the hospital after a C-section. Both she and the

baby tested positive for cocaine. We are ordering an investigation and need the baby to be in foster care during that time.”

“Sure can!” It was an easy yes. I couldn’t wait to tell my twelve-year-old daughter, Helen. She adored babies, and it had been a while since we had cared for an infant.

“Great! When you get to the hospital, go to the nurses’ station on the third floor.” Ellen knew our history—that we enjoyed fostering infants and toddlers and were successful with “failure to thrive” children. The effects from drugs or alcohol during a mother’s pregnancy often left babies with challenging obstacles to overcome. Three of my own five children still lived at home, so these little ones received much love from every direction. Like Helen, fifteen-year-old Sadie and ten-year-old Charles had great childcare skills and big hearts. I was proud of the care my own children gave to the foster children. (Elizabeth, our oldest, was attending college at Texas A&M in College Station, Texas, and our son Jason was in the US Air Force, stationed in Germany.)

A few hours later, after I finished my household tasks and everyone had lunch, Helen and I left for Casper, twenty-five minutes away.

When we arrived at the hospital, Helen made a beeline for the elevator. As soon as the door opened, she was ready. “What floor?” Helen’s fingers hovered over the elevator buttons, ready to push all of them if it would get us to the baby sooner. I couldn’t help but be excited, too, though I also had concerns. How had the drugs affected this infant’s body? What would she need from us?

Why was the elevator taking so long to get to the third floor?
Finally the doors slid open.

A nurse met us at the front desk. “We’ve been waiting for you. Follow me and we’ll get everything you need to take the baby home.”

In the nursery, lying in a bassinet under warm lights, a tiny baby

girl was swaddled in a white and pale green striped receiving blanket. Helen squealed when she saw the pink bow in the infant's black curly hair. She did a little wiggle dance, then stroked the baby's light brown forehead.

The nurse laughed. "You'll have her home in no time and will be able to hold her all you want. She's going to need lots of affection."

The nurse handed me a pile of release forms and instructions and took my driver's license to make a copy. I made quick work of the stack.

"She is sweet, but I need to warn you," the nurse's tone turned serious. "She will be showing some of the effects of the drugs for days, possibly even weeks."

"How severe are her symptoms?" I asked.

"She has been shaking and crying inconsolably at times, but it's best to let her work it out. Keep her swaddled tightly in a blanket and hold her close. She seems comforted by rocking, singing, and hearing a soft voice."

"We can do that," I said.

Helen nodded as if she took personal responsibility to do all that was instructed. Just then, another nurse came into the room.

"The baby's mother would like to meet you," she said.

"You don't have to," the first nurse interjected. "We can relay any information she wants to know."

"No, I'll go. Can I meet her now?" Helen was more than happy to stay with the infant.

I followed the nurse to a hospital room where a young woman with dark wavy hair and ivory skin was lying in bed, drinking a can of soda.

When she saw me, the woman put the can on the tray and tried to straighten up. Locking her jaw, she squeezed her eyes shut as she pushed against the back of the bed. I could see the pain from the C-section on her face.

I stood at the end of the bed. “Hi, I’m Debra. I will be taking care of your baby for a while. Your daughter is beautiful!”

“Thank you,” she said tersely, her eyes averted. “I will be staying at my parents’ house for a few weeks and plan to freeze my pumped breast milk. Would you be willing to come and pick it up?” She glanced at me, then looked away. “I would really like her to have my breast milk.”

I could tell it was hard for her to face me. She probably saw me as part of the system that was taking her baby away—a reaction not uncommon among biological mothers when DFS made the choice to take a child into foster care. I knew I’d feel horrible if I were in her shoes.

“I will talk with the caseworker and ask if it’s okay.” I smiled, hoping to reassure her that I was not the enemy. “What’s your daughter’s name?”

“Ally.” A soft blush came to the woman’s cheeks when she said the name. She lowered her head and her irritated manner melted as tears began to fall onto the sheet covering her lap.

New-mother emotions are tough enough, I thought. Staying in the hospital while your newborn is being released to strangers has got to be tougher.

“And what is your name?”

“Uh . . . Karen Bower,” she said.

“It’s nice to meet you, Karen.” The nurse stared at me and began to inch toward the door. I followed her out of the room and back to the nursery where Helen hadn’t moved from the baby’s side.

“Let’s pack up and get ready to go home, you two,” I said with a smile. I signed off on a clipboard as the nurse handed me back my driver’s license. We placed the baby in the car seat her mother had brought to the hospital and headed for the elevators.

It was well into the afternoon when we pulled out of the hospital parking lot. The maternity staff had given us formula and a bag of lotion, shampoo, and diaper ointment samples, but Helen and

I stopped at Target to buy some newborn sleeper gowns, infant T-shirts, and disposable diapers.

When we got home, Sadie and Charles excitedly took turns holding Ally as I pulled the wicker bassinet from the closet and gathered up the bedding to wash. So many babies had slept comfortably in this bed. Now it was Ally's turn.

Al and I had welcomed the joys and navigated the challenges of being foster parents. When Ally came into our home, we had fostered about 140 children, some for as briefly as one night, some for weeks, months, and even a few for several years.

We first became foster parents in 1982. We'd been married for three years and were a blended family with three children. (We had our other two children in the next several years.) A relationship with God was not part of our adult lives. Growing up, Al was raised with a nominal Catholic influence, as his mother was Catholic and his father had been raised Lutheran. The family seldom attended church. I was raised in a Presbyterian church and as a young child attended often, but as I grew older my family attended less consistently. I have often referred to my family as a churchgoing dysfunctional family. My parents divorced when I was eight, and attending church became a once-a-month event, if that.

When Al and I met and married, we attended a local church on occasions such as weddings, funerals, and special holidays like Christmas Eve and Easter, but in no way was it a part of our weekly routine. We did, however, pray with our children at the dinner table and at bedtime. Then, in 1980, I found myself wanting to get involved with the pro-life movement. Because the church we were attending did not share my views, I sent letters out to churches in our area to see who was supporting the pro-life cause. The only church that responded was a small Baptist church.

I decided to take our children there occasionally, and Al fell off from going to church with us.

One evening in 1982, Al and I were watching TV and saw an advertisement explaining that the community was in real need of families who would take in children—those who had been hurt or neglected by their parents for a number of different reasons. We looked at each other and agreed that we had a nice home, food on the table, and room in our hearts that we could share with such children. The next day, I drove to our local DFS office and filled out an application to become foster parents. After going through interviews and a home check, we received our first child, a little boy.

In our early days of fostering, we were critical of the parents, guardians, and family members who were supposed to be responsible for these innocent children, and we interpreted our role as temporary saviors to these neglected and abused children. We didn't think to question why the abuse occurred. We assumed it was because the adults were on drugs or were alcoholics or they had been abused so they abused others, or they had anger issues that were never addressed. To us, such parents seemed evil with no conscience or boundaries. Ours was a simplistic perspective, and though we didn't comprehend what would cause people to make such choices, we shared a passion to step in and help children who suffered at the hand, or lack of care, of their parents.

One of the first foster babies Al and I received had been rescued from a car when he was five days old. The infant had been abandoned inside the vehicle on a hot day; the mother had grabbed her drugs and run from the car. She was caught and arrested, but the police never knew about the baby until the mother's boyfriend came to bail her out. The baby almost didn't make it and was in the hospital for a month before we were able to bring him home and care for him.

Another infant had suffered skull fractures from abuse. Other children were burned with cigarettes or beaten, leaving their little bodies marked or bruised. Our children could see the abuse suffered by these little helpless children and were outraged. Their reactions gave voice to our own personal thoughts and ranged from “the people who did this should be put in jail for the rest of their lives” to “they should be taken out and whipped, or burned with cigarettes, or shot or electrocuted.” There wasn’t much grace or forgiveness for such people in their minds. Al and I, in our early years especially, often found ourselves feeling the same way.

But in 1986, four years into foster parenting, our lives changed dramatically. Al had been drinking excessively, and I was overcome with my inability to cope with it. We saw our marriage falling apart and feared divorce. Al decided to put himself into an alcohol treatment center and shortly thereafter, I discovered that I was pregnant.

One Sunday while he was still in treatment, I took the children to church and heard a sermon on Deuteronomy 5 addressing “the sin of the parents.” God used that sermon to bring me to my knees and into salvation as I realized how the sins of my parents, grandparents, and previous generations were affecting my life. Sins of bitterness, unforgiveness, lust, greed, and so much more. I saw with fresh eyes that those sins were at work in me and that Al and I, too, would be responsible for generational sin that would be reaped and repeated if there was nothing to stop it. Jesus Christ’s sacrifice provided a way to break those curses. If I would confess my sin, I would be cleansed of “all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). I chose Jesus and prayed that the sins and curses I was living out would be broken and, through his blood, forgiven and cleansed.

Unbeknownst to me, Al was going through his own journey of discovering faith while in treatment. When he and I shared our newfound faith with one another, we decided to trust God to create a new life in us and a new marriage for us. After Charles was born, Al and I stood and confessed our commitment to Jesus in

front of our entire family at a reunion. Al has not touched alcohol since his treatment and lives a life for Christ. Since then, God has brought us into a world of challenges that has grown our faith and called us to serve him fully.

Once we'd learned the truths of sin, confession, forgiveness, and spiritual growth, we realized that the care for our own children and those coming into our home needed to be not only physical and emotional care, but spiritual care as well. That changed everything. We saw that we had the responsibility to minister to these children with the truth that could also set them and even their families free. We could play our part in affecting lives for Christ no matter how much or how little time we had with each child. We were to share life with a future and a hope in Christ in whatever ways we could, so we made Sunday church attendance as a family a commitment, prayer a central part of our lives, and reading Bible stories to our children part of our routine.

Beyond that, we realized that we needed to accept the love God had for us and extend it to those who appeared in our eyes to be unlovely—abusive and neglectful parents. How, I wondered, could I come to love these parents whose children needed foster care? How could I accept that I was not superior to them—that we are all made of the same stuff? I didn't know, but it became my passion that God would work this miracle within me. And I realized that nothing short of a miracle was needed to bring about that love and forgiveness and grace in my heart.

A huge part of my growth in that journey took place as I wrote a Bible study for the crisis pregnancy center I served, to help some of our clients deal with the sexual abuse from which they had suffered. I, personally, had experienced such abuse in my early life and wanted God's truth to transform me. God showed me through the writing of that study that it was he who had the answers, and aside from him there can be little understanding or hope for healing. The self-published Bible study was called *Secret Sins* and was eventually used in a number of ministries by those

counseling others and by those who wanted an individual study with biblical answers to the abuse in their lives.

As Al and I experienced our personal encounters with Jesus, his forgiveness, and the Bible, we worked at believing that since God's nature was forgiving, ours needed to become forgiving as well. We challenged each other to seek forgiving hearts toward abusive parents. Not that our conversion immediately altered our natural responses of anger and the desire for retribution. We saw no excuse for such behavior, and though it was a struggle, we sought a change of heart toward such parents through the power of God.

It never got easier to see children hurt, especially by their own parents, and was upsetting every time a child was sent home after a parent fulfilled a list of hoop-jumping steps for the courts. Tragically, children who had been sexually abused were often sent back to the parent who didn't abuse but would probably not protect the child from the next boyfriend or family member who tried to abuse the child. Eventually, however, we realized that though we couldn't change a broken system, we were called to step into the lives of the children and parents for as long as God would allow and show them love and care and another way of living. We learned to explain to our children that this is what goes on in the world and all we can do is play the part we're called to play.

Only later would I learn that when called to play a part that seems impossible, God can make the impossible happen.

The first twenty-four hours with our new guest flew by. When Ally was awake, she was always in somebody's arms.

Fortunately, Ally did not show any signs of failure to thrive. From day one she was active and responsive to attention. She did, however, have withdrawal symptoms—a number of times. Her eyes got wide and she flung her tiny arms out, as if she were scared, and then she would cry. Sometimes she shook and trembled,

prompting more tears. We did our best to help calm her with warm bottles, rocking, and singing. When I sang to her, she would look at me and pucker her lips as if she were ready to join in.

The day after we brought Ally home to our modest country house on Goose Egg Road, I received another call from Ellen.

“The baby you are caring for has siblings who need fostering too. Karen’s parents are already raising the oldest child, but they are not in a position to take them all.”

“How many more are there?” I had four youth beds for foster children, and the two little brothers we’d been caring for had been returned to their mother.

“Four,” Ellen answered. “There is a six-year-old boy, two girls, ages four and five, and another boy, age three. If you are willing, you will be receiving them over the next week to ten days. They are scattered with different family members right now. Can you take all four of them?”

I knew I didn’t have to check with Al because he would agree with my answer. Long ago we’d agreed that as long as we had room and empty beds, our doors would always be open to more children.

“Absolutely! Bring them all!”

Another seemingly simple yes.