

FOREWORD BY PAT BOONE

"An amazing
story of love."

RICK WARREN

AUTHOR OF
The Purpose Driven Life

HEAVEN HEARS

THE TRUE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED
WHEN PAT BOONE ASKED THE WORLD TO PRAY
FOR HIS GRANDSON'S SURVIVAL

AFTERWORD BY DEBBY BOONE

LINDY BOONE MICHAELIS

with Susy Flory

A Special Note from Stormie Omartian

Bestselling Author of The Power of a Praying Wife

THE BOONE FAMILY has been an important and influential part of my life for over forty years and I love them all more than they will ever know. The power of their faith and their understanding of the right way to live in order to keep a family strong is more than impressive. It is a force that cannot be denied. And I have seen it lived out in each of them over decades.

When I got the call to pray for Ryan after his terrible accident, I knew the gravity of the situation and that a miracle was needed for him to even live through the night. As it turns out, that was only the beginning of countless miracles that were necessary for him to survive. He was so badly injured that there is no explanation as to why he not only survived but has come as far as he has today—and is still progressing—other than the miraculous power of God. I have not stopped praying for him, nor will I ever.

Lindy's book is more than a miraculous account of the long and painful life-and-death struggle her son, Ryan, has gone through. It is also the story of a courageous family

and the mother of a severely injured child whose love was so strong that she refused to give up on the miracles she believed were possible—even in the face of everything telling her otherwise. This is a book about undying love, raw despair, unwavering hope, and faith so strong that it refuses to weaken. It is a gut-wrenchingly honest human portrait of facing what every parent or grandparent fears. It is about the struggle of trying to give beyond what is humanly possible and then finding strength outside of oneself to do so. This situation changed the lives of all who were involved in it, and it will change your life as well as you read it. It did that for me, and my life is the better for it.

When I started reading *Heaven Hears*, I simply couldn't put the book down until I finished it. Ryan's story touched me deeply, and I know it will touch your heart as well.

Praise for *Heaven Hears*

“This is a wonderful book. I am proud to have played a small part in this incredible story of love and recovery. It is a must for your library.”

LARRY KING

“This is one of the most amazing stories of love I’ve ever witnessed.”

RICK WARREN

Pastor of Saddleback Church and author of *The Purpose Driven Life*

“*Heaven Hears* is a powerful, inspirational story that all should read.”

DR. DANIEL AMEN

Physician, bestselling author, and co-architect of The Daniel Plan

“I have known Pat and Shirley Boone for forty years, and I know that they know how to pray. When Ryan had the accident, Lindy and her family knew how to stand on the Word of God. As they prayed and believed God and didn’t give up, miracles began to take place. When Jesus begins a good work, he will complete it. *Heaven Hears* will help you to know that nothing is too hard for God, and that you will win the battle, if you don’t give up too soon. I salute this family.”

DODIE OSTEEEN

Cofounder of Lakewood Church, Houston, Texas

“I have known Lindy Boone Michaelis since she was a young girl. She has the heart of a never-quit, never-give-up spiritual warrior that most people don’t have. Anyone can have it, but most don’t. The seed of victory was first planted in her by her parents, Pat and Shirley Boone, but the staying power that it takes to never accept defeat comes only from the Word of God and total commitment to stand on it, no matter what. That’s Lindy! She is a heroine of faith, not only for Ryan, but for her entire family. *Heaven Hears* is the story of that faith. You can have that kind of faith, but you’ll have to do what Lindy has done to get it. Read about it. Pray for her as you live it with her. It’s an ongoing miracle that already has a marvelous outcome, but it’s not over yet. The best is yet to come. Here is the *key*—Jesus is Lord!”

KENNETH COPELAND

Founder of Kenneth Copeland Ministries

“By every measure I know God’s Word to reveal, *Heaven Hears* stands as a beautiful, truthful, grace-filled testimony to the power of simple-yet-unrelenting prayer and faith in God’s love and his healing promises. The sheer fact of Ryan Corbin’s being alive today (not to mention his amazing and continual progress), joined to the unshakable constancy of his mother’s and her family’s ironclad refusal to surrender ‘believing,’ give us a clear-cut testimony to a completely believable ‘miracle-in-motion.’ Lindy Michaelis’s story will stimulate practical, faith-in-action hope for any person in any situation.

“As a pastor-friend who has observed this epic from

the beginning, I urge readers: lift your eyes and open your heart to this truth—God’s changeless love and his Son’s unchanging grace are for us all today. *Heaven Hears* gives us Ryan Corbin’s case study as a reminder and a call to embrace the eternal promise: ‘All things are possible to those who believe!’”

PASTOR JACK W. HAYFORD

Chancellor of The King’s University—Los Angeles and founding pastor of
The Church On The Way

“Our son Steven was the person directly behind Ryan when he fell through the skylight, a day which changed all of our lives. We have witnessed this tragic near-fatal accident, this miracle of recovery, and this family that refused to believe anything but the best possible recovery. If ever a mother and family willed and prayed someone to stay with them for a higher calling, it was Lindy, her family, and the Boone family. They did this for Ryan. As someone has said, ‘Prayer is the greatest wireless connection.’ The Boone family had this connection and have kept it blazing for years! A true account of the power of prayer and the power of faith, hope, and love!”

BILL AND TANI AUSTIN

The Starkey Foundation

“Lindy Boone Michaelis, in her beautiful book *Heaven Hears*, reminds us that prayer is powerful. God knows us and the tiniest details of our lives, and even when it’s hard to understand why we are in a difficult situation, we know

that he is able to take our brokenness and reconstruct something with beauty and purpose. Heaven hears all of our cries and sighs, our pleas and petitions, and our praises and rejoicing. I believe this book will touch your heart.”

ROMA DOWNEY

Actress on the television series *Touched by an Angel*

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Contents

Foreword by Pat Boone *xv*

Introduction *xix*

- CHAPTER 1 Through the Skylight *1*
CHAPTER 2 Growing Up Boone *13*
CHAPTER 3 The Domestic One *33*
CHAPTER 4 The Fairy Tale Fractures *43*
CHAPTER 5 Handy and the Can-Do Kids *59*
CHAPTER 6 “I Think Something Is Going to
Happen to Me” *73*
CHAPTER 7 The Valley of the Shadow of Death *87*
CHAPTER 8 Midnight Is Only Sixty Seconds Long *101*
CHAPTER 9 At the Red Sea *117*
CHAPTER 10 The Secret Tent *135*
CHAPTER 11 The Happy Meal *155*
CHAPTER 12 Don’t Read This If You’re Easily
Offended *175*
CHAPTER 13 Ryan’s Reach *185*
CHAPTER 14 We’re Gonna Dance *195*

Afterword by Debby Boone *213*

Acknowledgments *219*

Where Are They Now? *225*

Notes *229*

About the Authors *231*

Foreword

BY PAT BOONE

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts
us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort
those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with
which we ourselves are comforted by God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4, ESV

THOSE VERSES from God's Word sound so empathetic and helpful and . . . well, *comforting*, don't they? And they are. But the requirement for receiving God's comfort is being *afflicted*. And we, as a family, surely have been. Especially Ryan, Lindy's son and my beloved grandson.

Big, handsome, intelligent, and good-hearted, Ryan was hurt so grievously that the doctors at UCLA doubted he would live through the first night. Until then, our large and growing family had been so blessed that it seemed we might make it through this life with only minor scars. But from the moment Ryan fell almost forty feet through the skylight of an apartment building in West Los Angeles, our lives were all affected—and afflicted.

How could this have happened to our first grandchild; the first boy; the happy, outgoing, talented young man with such a promising future, engaged to be married in just a few months? How could our loving God have *allowed* this

to happen? How could our separate and combined lives go on as before? If Ryan lived, would he ever be the same? Would we?

When we realized how seriously he had been injured, our hearts stopped. All our plans for the immediate future came to a halt. Even long-term plans were now in question. We could scarcely think of anything but Ryan, what he was going through, and whether we could pray him back to some kind of health and normalcy. During the first days and weeks, we were all just praying for Ryan to be able to breathe on his own.

That's affliction.

And where could we turn for any comfort, any hope, any promise?

Friend, you know there's only one place—and that's where we all turned. We huddled and prayed together in the hospital waiting room, in the halls, and out on the grounds. We called every church and Christian TV prayer line we could think of. We called our minister friends across America, and they assured us they'd prompt their congregations and audiences to pray for Ryan. CNN's Larry King called to ask if I'd like to come on his highly popular TV show to ask millions around the world to pray for our grandson and for us. Dear Lindy, our daughter and Ryan's mom, and I accepted his invitation. An estimated fifty million people worldwide saw each program and were asked to join us in prayer.

God is where you turn in the midst of a crisis. God is the source of real comfort. Family and friends do what they can, but they can't give you divine assurance; they can't intervene and decree your loved one's healing; they can't actually cause

it to happen. Only God can do those things. And so we prayed, fervently and continually.

In fact, on the day after the horrible accident—while Ryan was in a deep coma, on every kind of life support, with tubes and gadgets sticking out of his head—I laid my hand on his chest and prayed as I never had before: “Lord, you filled this boy with your Holy Spirit when he was only four years old. You’ve made this beautiful body and brain your dwelling place since then. I’m not asking you to reach down to touch and heal Ryan . . . *I’m asking you to rise up in him, and heal every cell and ruptured place in this temple of your Spirit . . . from within him!*”

And that’s what our loving Lord has done, over these long twelve years. In answering our countless prayers, he has involved the prayers and support of so many people in many ways. His greatest human instrument by far has been Ryan’s incredible mother . . . our daughter Lindy. This whole ordeal is Lindy’s story, the account of her indomitable, constant hold on God’s promises and power and grace. As members of our extended family have rallied in every way we could think of, Lindy has been the linchpin, the quarterback calling the plays. She has creatively tried and changed various therapies; found wonderfully capable caregivers to care for Ryan in twelve-hour shifts around the clock; and worked tirelessly with her son to encourage his own commitment, faith, and patience in his interminable saga of recovery. All the while Lindy has continued to be a wonderful wife and mother to her other kids.

Along with her own mom, Shirley, Lindy has consistently read God’s Word to Ryan and helped him memorize and repeatedly quote the promises of his heavenly Father.

Though you're about to read her account of this triumphant journey, even she can't fully convey how long it has seemed, how many times it appeared hopeless, how many times we, her family, have cried out to God, "Why, Lord, *why?* *Why is it taking so long?* You could just speak the word, and Ryan would be whole, restored, miraculously healed, to your own glory! *Why, Lord, why?*"

And that's the point of this foreword. Why, indeed?

I believe Ryan's miracle, the proof that heaven hears, has been allowed by God to stretch out over so long . . . because so many others go through even longer trials. They cry out the same plaintive questions, challenged to the limit as the years go by with seemingly declining prospects of change or healing. This story, Ryan and Lindy's story—ultimately God's story—was written to comfort those who are in any affliction, even those who have endured for years, "with the comfort with which we ourselves" have been comforted, encouraged, bolstered, and finally rewarded by God, in his infinite purpose and grace.

As long as it has been—and while he still has some ways to go—Lindy, Ryan, and the rest of us rejoice in how our faith has been tested, challenged, and deepened, and how it has grown. We are all the better for it, and though we would have avoided it if we'd had the choice, we see God's fingerprints on all that has happened. We pray he will use our experience to build the faith of others—and to comfort them in their affliction.

Introduction

“DO YOU BELIEVE, Lindy, in prayer?”

Larry King leaned forward in his chair, elbows on the table, his gaze sympathetic but searching.

“Oh, yes.”

“Even though it has been two months.”

“Oh, yes.”¹

I felt as if I were in the hot seat. It was my second appearance on *Larry King Live* in as many months, and I knew Larry was asking me the same question millions of viewers had: Does God really hear when we cry out to him?

“You’ve been praying for two months,” Larry said.

“Yes.”

Eight weeks before, life as I’d known it had been completely upended when my twenty-four-year-old son, Ryan, stepped through a skylight and fell three full stories. His skull was fractured, his lungs collapsed, and his heart stopped. When he broke through that roof, Ryan fell into a very different life, teetering on the edge of eternity.

For weeks my firstborn child lingered between life and death in the Intensive Care Unit at UCLA Medical Center. At first I was in shock, grieving, looking for answers. I felt so helpless; prayer was my lifeline.

Yet I wanted to do more. What I hadn’t expected was

an opportunity to appear before a worldwide audience, all because Larry King was a friend of my dad, Pat Boone. Daddy had been friends with Larry since the talk-show icon had hosted a local radio show from a Miami hotel lounge back in the late 1950s. At the time, my dad was one of the most popular charting artists in the country (second only to Elvis Presley). Larry invited him to be a guest on his show, and they immediately hit it off. Over forty years later, Larry had made a name for himself as host of *Larry King Live*, CNN's most-watched and longest-running program.

Given their long-standing friendship, Daddy wasn't too surprised when he got a call from Larry's producer shortly after Ryan's accident. The producer said Larry had heard about Ryan's accident and wanted Daddy and me to come on the show for a few minutes so that people would hear about Ryan's accident and pray for him.

Even though Daddy wasn't surprised by the call, he thought the reason for the invitation was extraordinary. "He's giving us a platform," he told me.

I wasn't sure I could do it. "I feel too raw. I am a gaping wound. How do I talk about this in public? It's all too horrible."

But we decided to accept the invitation. Ryan needed every prayer he could get. Our first appearance on July 26, 2001, was short—a small segment at the end of one of Larry's programs. Daddy and I had been given just enough time to let viewers know about Ryan's accident and ask them to pray for his recovery.

The response to our first appearance was, as Larry said,

“almost unbelievable”; in fact, for days afterward UCLA Medical Center had been besieged with calls from people asking about Ryan.

Larry invited us back to his show three weeks later. Now my dad and I sat across from him for a second time. I didn’t have to wait long before Larry followed up with another question.

“Why not? Why not an answer?”

“Can I read you something real quick?” I asked, reaching for the Bible I’d brought with me. Given the ups and downs of the past few weeks, I had few insights of my own.

“One thing the Lord has been trying to work in me,” I said, as I flipped to the book of Romans, “is patience. And I rely more heavily on what he says in his Word now than ever before.”

Finding the passage I’d been looking for, I began reading aloud: “We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation.”²

I’m not sure this was the “answer” Larry or his audience was looking for, yet it was already clear to me that God was up to something. I was still working on what that passage meant, but I knew I had a big trial (that was an understatement), and I was told to rejoice because I would gain endurance, strength of character, and a confident expectation of salvation through it. My job was to hold fast to his Word and to do so in front of millions. I knew this was a rare opportunity to let viewers witness faith in action, even if it was the size of the proverbial mustard seed.

“I’m learning patience through this,” I said. “But I still believe that my son is going to get better.”

About forty-five minutes later, Larry gave the last word of the night to my dad, who once again asked people to pray.

And boy, did they pray. *Heaven Hears* is the story of what happened next. It’s a story about the power of prayer. It’s about miracles. It’s about overcoming despair, persisting through suffering, and surviving against all odds.

It’s an unbelievable story, and it’s not over yet.

If you or someone you love has experienced a traumatic injury, you know that it’s like a hallucinatory roller-coaster ride operated by a madman. There are tremendous ups and downs, not to mention sharp, jerky turns and dips that make your stomach tie up in knots. There are moments of triumph and joy and excitement, but there are also tears and screams and moments where you hold on until your knuckles turn white.

I’m still on that roller coaster, although it’s slowed down a bit and the twists and turns aren’t quite as bad these days. I’ve learned a few things along the way: that we are spiritual beings, here for a reason. That good things can come from bad. And that heaven does hear—even before we have a chance to look up.

CHAPTER I

THROUGH THE SKYLIGHT

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.

We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

PIERRE TEILHARD DE CHARDIN

RYAN AND HIS ROOMMATES were always on a quest to look good. After all, they were young guys living in LA and hoping to make it in the entertainment business. Even though the dangers of skin cancer were well known by 2001, a golden tan was still status quo in Southern California. In that way, I think Ryan took after me and his grandfather Pat.

The problem with his quest for the perfect tan was that Ryan lived in an old stucco Brentwood apartment building far from the beach. He did have access to a swimming pool next door, but the apartment buildings on Dorothy Street were built around central courtyards, almost like a picture frame, and the sun's rays didn't last long before they passed into shadow.

In the middle of Ryan's building was a garden with concrete pathways. Framed around it were three stories of apartments. The front door of each apartment opened up to a walkway that ran around the inside of the frame. Instead of a metal railing, each walkway was bordered by

a three-and-a-half-foot concrete wall on the courtyard side. Ryan and his roommates lived on the second floor in apartment 208. On the third floor was a stairway that led up to a roof-access door. The building was full of young professionals, so it wasn't uncommon for people to head up to the roof to sunbathe once the sun's rays moved on from the courtyard.

One sunny June day, Ryan got home from his job at California Pizza Kitchen at about three in the afternoon; his job on a television show was on hiatus so he worked as a server at the pizza restaurant to pay the bills. Ryan changed into shorts and flip-flops, threw on a black backpack holding his keys and a few other odds and ends, grabbed a towel, and invited his two roommates to come along. Grant was playing a video game and passed, but Steve decided he could use some sun too. The two of them headed upstairs, laughing and joking about their latest get-fit-and-good-looking schemes. They climbed the stairs to the roof-access door. It was closed but unlocked. Ryan went first.

After he stepped out into the bright afternoon sun, Ryan skirted to the left around a metal railing and then turned right to walk alongside it. To his left was a skylight flush with the roof. The skylight was designed to let in fresh air and natural light to the darker nooks and crannies of the apartment walkways. But at some point, probably due to the heat of the sun or maybe even rainwater problems, the four-by-eight-foot opening had been covered with a corrugated fiberglass panel, tacked down around the edges. Over the years and with exposure to the elements, the fiberglass cover had grown brittle and faded to almost perfectly match the color, and even the texture, of the rocks and pebbles on the tar-and-gravel roof.

Ryan walked along the pathway between the metal railing on his right and the skylight on his left. The path was no more than two feet wide; Steve followed about four feet behind. Ryan was almost past the skylight when Steve saw his roommate's left foot come down on the corner. Ryan's size 14 flip-flops bridged over the corner with his toes and heel still on the roof but the middle of his foot, bearing his weight, pressed down and the fiberglass started to flex inward. His right foot was still on the roof but as the fiberglass panel began to give way, his left foot started sliding toward the middle of the skylight. There was nothing beneath to bear his weight. As his foot slid inward, his body rotated around toward Steve, and Ryan looked straight into his roommate's eyes, surprised, and fell down through the fiberglass panel. There wasn't much noise except for the cracking of the fiberglass and a few thumps. Ryan was gone.



I was dreaming of sunshine and beaches when the phone started ringing.

Where am I?

It was dark, and I was disoriented. Finally I remembered. I was on vacation with my husband, Mike, and our thirteen-year-old son, Tyler, in Málaga, Spain. We'd been at a time-share condo for about four or five days. During the day, I worked out and enjoyed the pool while Mike and Tyler played golf. One day we'd driven our rental car to a picturesque village at the top of a narrow, winding road. On another, Tyler had tried out parasailing. We'd even talked about a day trip to Morocco.

But for now I was sound asleep after a full day of sun and seafood. *So where is that ringing coming from?* Mike was still asleep, so I got out of bed and bumped my way out of the bedroom toward the sound in the living room. Tyler was asleep on the sofa bed—I couldn't believe he slept through the noise.

I finally found the phone and picked it up. "Lindy, we've been trying to reach you."

It was my sister Debby. Between the late-night call and the tone of her voice, I knew I'd better brace myself. It had to be bad.

"Nobody knew the number where you were staying. It's Ryan. He's had an accident." My breath caught in my throat.

"Not a car accident. He fell when he was on the roof of his apartment building. He and Steve were going up to get some sun but Ryan somehow stepped on a skylight and it broke."

My stomach clenched into a tight ball. Time slowed and my brain felt numb. I tried to concentrate on my sister's voice.

"He's at UCLA Medical Center now, and I believe he's being operated on. Mama and Daddy are there. I stayed home to try to reach you. I finally got hold of the people staying in your house and they gave me this number."

I felt like a thirsty sponge soaking in the information but, at the same time, like I was being wrung out.

"Lindy, all I know is that he has a skull fracture and they already had to remove his spleen but I know you can live without one of those."

What am I going to do? I'm in Spain. Ryan is in California. How long before I can get to him?

Ryan had dropped us at the airport just a few days before.

My warm and wonderful twenty-four-year-old son had wrapped his arms around me and bent over to give me a good-bye kiss on the cheek.

It was nice not to worry much about him anymore. He'd finally graduated from Pepperdine and landed a job as a production assistant on a TV show—maybe the first rung on the ladder toward becoming a writer for television and film. And he had just proposed to the love of his life. Ryan was ready to be a grown-up and take care of a family of his own. Now this!

It can't be happening. He has to be all right.

I have to get home.

Mike had woken up, heard my panicky voice, and wandered in to find out what was going on. Tyler, too, was now sitting up on his sofa bed. After I hung up, I told them that Ryan had had an accident and then we joined hands in that little living room and prayed, pouring out our fears to God.

As we held hands, my mind raced. I didn't know the details, so I could only guess at how bad Ryan's condition really was and what exactly I should be praying for. *A skull fracture? What exactly does that mean? Is that always terrible or do people get better from that?*

It was a mother's nightmare—the worst thing that had ever happened to one of my children and I was too far away to be able to get there quickly. Yet somehow I knew that God was with my son and that I would have to connect to God to be able to connect to Ryan. I have never been so grateful for the gift of prayer. When we called out to God, it didn't feel like a feeble ritual but rather a powerful intervention.

Maybe God would heal Ryan—but I had no guarantees. Maybe the doctors could keep him alive and make

him well—but I really didn't know. All I did know was that God loved Ryan, God was with Ryan, and God was with the doctors.

As we stood together in that dark room in Spain, I prayed my heart out. “Lord, please surround Ryan with your love and let him live and recover from this awful accident. Help us get the plane flights we need to get to him as quickly as possible. Guide the doctors, nurses, and every human being who has something to do with Ryan's care.”

After we said amen, we started hashing out our plans. Mike suggested waiting until we had more specifics on Ryan's condition. “Maybe it isn't so bad,” he said. “Maybe Ryan will be safe in the hospital recovering and there is nothing we can do anyway if we go home. It can't be that bad that we can't hang here for a while. Maybe we shouldn't jump to conclusions.”

But all I could do was tell Mike I was leaving. “You and Tyler can stay, but I *will* be on the first flight home.” When he heard my voice, Mike quickly started packing too. He knew that even if Ryan was okay, I would need his support until we knew exactly what had happened and what we needed to do.

Mike took the lead in handling the logistics. After he'd spent an hour on the phone arranging for our tickets, we quickly packed, checked out, and headed for the airport. Then we began an agonizing twenty-four-hour journey on three separate flights—from Málaga to Madrid, from Madrid to Miami, and then a final flight home from Miami to Los Angeles. Each time we landed, I found a pay phone and

called Debby. Each time I talked to her, I realized more and more that Ryan's life really was at stake.

The longest leg of the journey was the eight-hour flight across the Atlantic. Up to this point I was both numb and agitated, but I hadn't really absorbed the news. Now it began to sink in, and sitting still on that long flight got harder and harder. I felt impatient as time crept past.

Then I sat up straight. *I know what I can do. I need to write. I need a pen and paper so I can write everything I'm feeling. And if I don't, I'm going to explode.*

It took me a few frantic minutes to find a pen. Mike pulled some legal paperwork out of his briefcase, and I turned the pages over to write on the back. The words started pouring out and I wrote as fast as my shaky hand could write.

Trapped! It's a feeling of being trapped when you find out a child is hanging on the brink of life and death. Then to try to get to him, to be near him, tell him you love him, then to be on a plane, elbow to elbow with people who don't know and don't care and to spend hours and hours thinking he could have died and I wouldn't even know it—I'm doubly trapped! I want to scream and let the whole plane know I'M IN PAIN! I'M SCARED!

I thought hard about what Debby had said in one of our calls. She told me doctors were having a difficult time getting a CAT scan of Ryan's head to determine the extent of the damage. He was on life support, and doctors were afraid that switching him to a portable unit in order to get a CAT scan

was just too risky. That fact alone told me a lot about his condition, and the farther we got across the Atlantic, the more I awoke to a real, live, lasting nightmare. I was beginning to understand Ryan's situation and I knew the nightmare would not be over in a week or even a month.

I want to get home desperately, but once I do, I know I'm going to dread seeing him. Please, God, let him look like Ryan. I don't know how I'll react, and it matters to me that I behave in a way that will help him and honor him. If he can hear me, I don't want to scare him with my tears. I want my voice to comfort him.

As the news continued to sink in, I felt claustrophobic and then became very irritated at the people on the plane with us. They seemed blissfully unaware of my pain, acting as if all was right with the world. I watched them eating their prepackaged airplane food and laughing at the movie. As if there was anything to laugh about on this particular day! I knew I wasn't making sense but I felt as if I was on the verge of screaming.

My thoughts raced.

I want to be strong for Jessi and Tyler but I feel like I may fall apart and cause them more trauma.

I think Mama is trying to be strong for me. She must want to scream and crumble too. I know how she adores Ryan.

And the men—I feel sorry for Doug and Mike and Daddy. There's so much pressure on them to maintain

composure. The women are expected to weep in front of the whole world but the men try to wait until it's private. Is it really easier for them to stay optimistic?

And Ryan's fiancée, Kristen. What must she be going through? I feel a need to do and say the right thing for her. But what is that?*

I wondered what had really happened. Was the sun in Ryan's eyes? Was that why he didn't see the skylight? Did he trip? Or did he think the surface was strong enough to bear his weight? I didn't know the details but my imagination stopped there. I couldn't allow myself to picture anything else.

I've given Ryan to God; I can imagine facing either a funeral or nursing Ryan back to health and then dealing with rehabilitation. But my absolute worst fear is serious brain damage. I've heard of brain damage where the patient has to relearn how to eat, talk, and walk. I can do that. But irreparable damage? I suppose I fear that the most.



My parents live only five minutes from UCLA Medical Center, so my mother got there just as the paramedics who had transported Ryan from his building to the hospital were coming out of the emergency room. Mama went up to one of them and said, "That was my grandson. How is he?"

All he said was, "Lady, don't get your hopes up."

* Not her real name.

At this point, I was still asleep in Spain and unaware that my son's body had been broken. But Mama knew this was the start of a battle, and being a fighter, she rose to the occasion. As she always has. Mama has prayed for Ryan and for the rest of our family every day for as long as I can remember.

Mama waited for the doctors to fill her in on Ryan's condition. When the report came, it was all bad news. Ryan's lungs had collapsed from the impact. It wasn't clear how long he had gone without sufficient oxygen. Doctors had removed his spleen, which had burst, and he was still bleeding internally. Ryan's skull was fractured, and his jaw was broken. They suspected a spinal cord injury in the cervical column, and on top of everything else, he had a couple of cracked ribs and other serious internal injuries.

The doctors made it clear that people in Ryan's condition don't usually make it. Mama immediately called my father to inform him the accident was serious. He came down right away to join her.

Mama has always loved Ryan as if he were her own son. And somehow, what the doctors said didn't instill any fear in her. As my mother tells it, although she had clearly heard the warnings of both the paramedic and the doctors, she heard an even louder voice coming from within. All those years of studying the Word of God, committing those words to memory, and storing them in her heart had made her ready to clearly hear the Lord in Ryan's situation.

Deep down in her being she heard and knew this: *He will live and not die and declare the glory of God.* Mama felt no fear,

shed no tears, felt the peace that passes all understanding, and knew this Word was from God.

Those twelve words from Psalm 118:17 are the reason Mama didn't experience fear when I would have collapsed in panic. I often wonder if, in the divine plan, I was placed half-way around the world from Ryan while my mother was just five minutes away because the need of the moment wasn't fear, but faith.

My parents sat in the waiting room and prayed, resisting fear whenever it threatened to rise up within them. Calls went out to family and friends, and the waiting room quickly became a gathering place for those who loved Ryan. Then our family began to try to reach us by phone. The only people who had the phone number to our condo were relatives of Mike who'd been house-sitting for us, and they weren't answering the phone. Several hours later, someone tracked them down and I finally got that middle-of-the-night phone call.

Ryan received thirty-six pints of blood over the next several hours as the medical team worked to stop the internal bleeding caused by organs hemorrhaging from the traumatic impact of the fall. Stopping the bleeding and getting Ryan on a respirator were the highest priorities right then. Later I was told that Ryan's heart stopped twice during their efforts to save his life. All the while I slept peacefully on the other side of the world.

As we approached Miami, I was in shock and grieving, but for a few moments I had some clarity as I caught a small glimpse of the days, weeks, and months ahead of me. Once again, I poured my thoughts out on paper:

HEAVEN HEARS

I've often thought that something absolutely awful is bound to happen in my life. It's been too easy, too perfect. I know people grow through trials and struggles and I haven't had hardly any. I've almost felt guilty about it. But I've also wondered if it just wasn't my turn.

If it is my turn to grow and do something for the cause of Christ, then all I ask is, God, show me how. Don't let this suffering be for no reason.