

Appendix A: In Their Own Words

Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts, and I will tell of Your greatness.

—*Psalm 145:6*

It's one thing for me to say God brought amazing beauty out of our tragedy, touching many people and changing their lives forever. A skeptical reader could dismiss the claim as the biased opinion of a doting mother.

But what if the people whose lives were changed speak for themselves? This appendix contains testimonies from individuals, many of whom you'll recognize as "characters" in the story. As you read their powerful words, listen for the sound of ripples.

Pam Dowd (Jeanne's friend)

The phone call came as I was planning a shopping trip with my daughters, Natalie, Abigail, and Lindsay. In the seconds it took me to reach the receiver, my family's life changed forever.

Before I could say hello, a breathless Philip Jones said, "Pam, I know how close you are to the Damoffs." Philip's voice cracked, and I knew something was terribly wrong. I'd seen Philip in stressful situations before, and he'd never sounded like this. Then he said the words I still can't believe: "Jacob drowned."

I felt as if I'd been dropped from a very tall building. I grabbed the dresser to stay upright.

Philip continued before I could catch my breath. “He must have been under the water fifteen minutes before we found him. We’ve tried everything. We’re doing CPR, but we can’t get him to breathe. Jacob’s dead. I found him, but . . . I was too late.”

My hand flew to my open mouth. Then, when I didn’t think the pain could get worse, he added, “Jeremy Maxey’s still missing. We’re looking for him. I’ve got to go.”

Two dead on a school trip? It couldn’t be. I knew the staff. I’d been Trinity’s principal for almost eight years. I turned to walk into the next room, searching for words to describe such horrible news to my fifteen-year-old twins and my ten-year-old. Natalie was Jacob’s best friend. Abigail thought she’d marry Jacob someday. Grace and Lindsay played together often.

I can still hear Natalie and Abigail’s wails of terror like they’re echoing in a dream I can’t wake from. Lindsay, so young at the time, started to cry as the four of us dropped to our knees in the game room, clinging to each other, to offer immediate prayers to the only One who understood what was going on. We certainly didn’t.

We prayed the only words we could find. “No! No! Help Jacob and Jeremy. Dear God, no! Please don’t let this happen. Protect them, God. Help the teachers and parents find Jeremy. Let them live. Revive Jacob, Lord. Please help us. Be with Jeanne, George, Grace, and Luke as they find out.”

We couldn’t think of anything else to say, so we said it all again.

This was supposed to be a fun day. A beginning-of-summer kind of day filled with laughter and lightheartedness. It had become a nightmare. The phone rang again, and we stared at it with dread. I ran to pick it up. The girls clustered around me.

A breathless Philip said, “He’s breathing, Pam. Jacob’s breathing. Praise God! He’s blue, but he’s alive.” I could hear the ambulance siren in the background.

We’ll never understand why Jeremy had to die that day, and we grieved for his family, but we had found a tiny window of hope in the tragedy. God had answered our desperate prayers for Jacob. Surely He would answer those we said as we rushed toward the hospital.

I tried to prepare the girls as we drove. I didn’t know what it would mean for Jacob to have been dead for so long, but I knew it couldn’t be good. Natalie and Abigail, on the other hand, were elated he was breathing and fully expected Jacob to be recovered by evening. We arrived before the ambulance to find about a hundred students, teachers, friends, and family gathered in small circles—clinging, crying, and praying for the nightmare to end.

When they ushered Jeanne through the emergency room doors, I thought I’d die. I couldn’t imagine being Jacob’s mother. She looked so pale and fragile. She didn’t focus on anyone as her eyes searched for George. When he came to take her to Jacob, I breathed my first sigh of relief. At least she could hold him, and surely he’d wake up now that she was there and he was breathing again. We knew so little about anoxic brain injury back then.

I don’t remember eating for the first three weeks. I think I lost ten or more pounds. Normal daily activities seemed meaningless when I could be helping Jeanne and George, assuring they got some rest, and taking care of details such as sitting with Jacob, answering the never-ending phone calls in the ICU waiting room, and fielding the constant questions from the crowd of friends and family gathered to wait for Jacob to emerge from coma.

Nothing seemed important except sitting with Jacob, singing to him, quoting Scripture, and praying over him. My husband, Rodney, took care of things at home. I spent my waking hours

filling whatever need I could, and yet I still felt helpless—as if I couldn't do enough to buffer the constant pain around the Damoff family.

Through trips back and forth to ICU, to Dallas and Baylor Rehab, on daily visits to the nursing home, and eventually to Jacob's house, I learned we serve a faithful God who supplies our needs one at a time—neither too soon nor too late. His timing is perfect.

I had never considered God's eternal sovereignty much before Jacob drowned to live again. But after many hours of walking through Jacob's fragile, damaged world, trying to glimpse God's perspective, while Jacob's life pages turned to reveal yet another miracle, I came to believe God has a plan for every circumstance we encounter. It's undeniable, unchangeable, and unshakable. He is neither surprised by the events of our lives nor by our choices.

God is not at our whim, though He allows us to beckon and call. He teaches us how to pray answerable prayers. He is sovereign, Yahweh, our healer and provider. It is when we trust Him that He can begin to unfold the plans He created specifically for us.

Jacob's story has not ended. It is but a drop in the pond of God's eternal provision for us all. God used Jacob to capture our attention in a way that didn't exist before the accident. Jacob's life speaks volumes to my soul. God is trustworthy and sovereign. He understands dying and living again!

Fear not, He beckons our quavering hearts as we stare into an uncertain future. *I always have a plan.*

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to

me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,' declares the LORD" (Jeremiah 29:11–14 NIV).

Grace Damoff Romjue (Jacob's sister)

Before the accident, Jacob was a force to be reckoned with. I was actually afraid of him for most of my childhood. But I loved him more deeply than I feared him. I adored him, like children look upon their favorite heroes and role models with upturned faces and eyes filled with awe.

I couldn't understand him with his passions and volatile, often violent emotions, with his determined mind that could not be swayed. He was so independent and so strong. He could always stand on his own, and he was always the trailblazer. He had a charisma that drew all kinds of people to him. People admired and respected him for his individuality. People not only wanted to be around him, they wanted to *be* him.

I remember I used to love going into his room on those rare occasions when he would let me. There was so much of him that I didn't understand: his artwork, his music, the way he dressed, the girls he liked. I was always trying to get glimpses inside his world to try to unravel all the mysteries that seemed to surround him.

Even though he was my brother, he seemed so distant from me much of the time. Luke and I had always been playmates as children, content to spend our time in the house, the backyard, or the neighborhood. Jacob was cut out of an entirely different cloth. It seemed as if he was always pushing the boundaries of his world farther and farther outward, blazing trails into the unknown.

Little did any of us know how much he would need this strength and independence to endure the trials he would have to face.

When I first imagined I would have to live the rest of my life without Jacob, I felt so inadequate to be the new oldest sibling—to try to fill Jacob’s role in our family. I wasn’t ready to be the first to do everything, to be the trailblazer that he had always been. I couldn’t imagine getting my driver’s license, graduating from high school, leaving for college, getting married—without having seen him do it first. There was no possible way to imitate his charisma. I wasn’t a trendsetter like he was.

Then I thought about how I was never going to be able to explain to other people who he had been to me—what a strong personality he had, all the elements of his sense of humor, his intellectual brilliance, his mysterious aloofness, and his contagious energy. This is the person I had spent my childhood admiring. I had walked in his shadow, counted on him to show me how so many challenging things could be done. I could not have imagined at the time of my greatest grief that he would show me—through his tragedy—how to conquer even greater challenges than getting a driver’s license and leaving for college.

Jacob became a new person in my life after his accident. He played a different role than the big brother I had known as a child. But he continues to be the big brother whose strength of personality and overwhelming passion and energy cause me to admire him as a child admires a hero.

I have gained so many things from Jacob. He was an inspiration to me from my earliest years, and he continues to be my inspiration. If ever I have seen God’s restorative work it has been in Jacob’s life—renewing him through death and suffering to be a person who now draws

people to him, not through his own uniqueness, but through an innocent simplicity that directs others' eyes to heaven. Jacob had this gift even before his accident.

Across the top of the doorframe exiting his bedroom he had a sign that read "Today is the greatest day and I am in it" with a small drawing of three crosses on a hill. In college I placed an identical sign over my dorm-room door, and as I exited into the world each day, I was not only reminded of Jacob—his passion and fearlessness—but I was reminded of the beauty that God is able to accomplish in each day because we have life and creativity and passion and boldness through Him.

Luke Damoff (Jacob's brother)

It is almost as if all my memories have been made into an independent film, and I watch them at various speeds with some of the scenes deleted. I remember Mr. Godinich, my best friend Cody's dad, telling me Jacob was hospitalized. I can hear Cody as the elevator doors opened asking what "ICU" stood for. Then I'm running down the hall to my father, crying tears of frightened ignorance. I don't remember him telling me anything. I just remember finally knowing the truth and wishing somehow it was six hours earlier when my brother was normal and greeted me with "Hey, stupid."

I can see the chapel in the ICU with its wood-paneled walls and warm yellow light shining on the dark brown and deep red of the kneeling rails and pews. I remember my father taking me there and telling me that Jeremy was dead. I can hear that word ringing hollow in my head and feel its crashing into me with realization. I cried with Cody. Blind with tears; crying, not for my brother, but for Jeremy.

I can see the students in swimsuits. Hair still wet with lake water, cheeks streaked with saline. I feel the crush of a thousand hugs from faceless weeping people. I remember the comfort. The aluminum pans of food made by widows. Each meal had a different signature, instead of the consistency of my mother's cooking.

I stayed with my cousins on their farm that summer, and then later with my grandparents in Dallas. I remember the distraction and not seeing my brother for weeks at a time. I remember the tangible silence of not talking about what was always on our minds. This is what I remember.

I am unsure how to precisely assess how this has affected me. I never experienced being a teenager without having had a tragedy occur. I don't ever recalling hating God, though I recall being angry. I don't recall being forced to grow up quickly, though looking back I know I was—not by any will of my parents but by the circumstances surrounding the life I was led to. I don't recall a conscious decision to get up and face every day, though I made them every time I got out of bed in the months and years that followed.

I do recall being embarrassed at the sort of pitied fame that only a small town can give its unfortunate members. I recall not feeling like I deserved or earned pity, and I distinctly recall not wanting it. I always felt normal, and I still feel sorry for families with disabled children, even though I suppose I am a part of one. I guess I still believe it will never happen to me, even though it already has.

I should say how God was merciful throughout this whole ordeal. For He was exceedingly merciful. Every breath given was mercy and grace. Every meal cooked was mercy and grace. The strength to rise every morning and lie back down at night was mercy and grace. The unwillingness to roll over and give up was mercy and grace.

That God has used and will continue to use this, for His glory is the ultimate mercy. And that He has allowed and will continue to allow my family's trials to glorify Him is the ultimate grace. It is impossible for me to fully know or understand just how my brother's accident has brought and will continue to bring glory to the Lord, but I am assured that it has and it will continue to. I have seen a little, and heard a little more, of the stories of people positively affected by my brother's drowning. But even in my ignorance I have learned to accept and love the fate God has given my family and all of those who know and love my brother.

I still wonder why it must be this way. I still grieve when I see my brother sometimes. I wonder what he would be like, what kind of man he would be if he had been given a chance to live a normal life. I still get angry at times, thinking about the brilliant mind that is so damaged. But I am constantly humbled by the words of Job: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."

My father taught me from a young age to hold everything with an open hand—to accept what was given graciously and to be willing to give it up just as graciously if it was asked or required. If we are to hold everything with an open hand we must hold on to our family the same way. And though we may wish and pray and hope that God's will allows for them long life and prosperity, we must also be willing to accept the alternative, for everything is the Lord's, and all was made for His glory. He never promised us ease, but He promised us comfort.

I have learned through this to glorify God in all things—to praise His name in the very worst of times. Not for my comfort but for His glory. I have learned to joyfully accept the things God gives. Maybe not happily, but with joy. For I have been promised that, while it may not be easy, it will work out for good, if I truly love Christ and seek to glorify Him. What this has taught me,

and continues to teach me every day, is that I must say at all times, “Blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Sharon Miller (Jeanne’s sister, Jacob’s aunt)

Jacob was the first child to be born to my siblings—an adorable, curly-headed blond boy. He became the hero to my firstborn, Nathan, as they were growing up. An independent, fun-loving child, all his cousins adored him. On the day of his accident, my faith was shaken down to its roots. Tragedies were for other people, not my family! I felt helpless and out of control. We all hoped for an instant miracle—something quick and easy so we could get our lives back to normal. It was not to be. God wanted to take us deeper.

I have always been a wimp when it comes to pain or suffering. I hate hospitals, and nursing homes make me physically ill. But spending time there with someone you love changes your perspective. Now when I see people in wheelchairs, I look them in the eye and smile at them. That could be my nephew. That is a real person with real feelings. Funny how we can ignore such an idea until it hits close to home. My attitude toward sick or disabled people will never be the same.

The main thing I have come to realize is that we don’t get to pick what happens to us or our children or our spouses. I am responsible to walk in obedience to God, but He is sovereign. He alone sees my life in its context of eternity, and He alone can call the shots according to His perfect plan. This is a very sobering thought for a control freak like me. But it is also a freeing thought. God has it all worked out. My job is to learn to trust Him.

I have seen how God pours out His grace on those who need it. Watching Jeanne and George deal with this situation has strengthened my faith that God's grace really is sufficient. Their lives are not ruined. Their marriage is intact and stronger than ever. It is a blessing to be around Jacob—he is sweet and wonderful and funny. He is handsome and genuine. He is still Nathan's hero, and an example to us all.

Nathan Miller (Jacob's cousin)

It was May of 1996, and I was twelve years old. My dad picked me up from baseball practice. He always forgot to bring me water, and this time I drank some of his Diet Coke. I never really liked the taste of Diet Coke. Halfway through the drive home he said he had something to tell me. My cousin Jacob had been in an accident.

Jacob was not my *real* best friend, because we hadn't lived in the same town since early childhood. Jacob had two siblings who were both closer to my age than he was. He was fifteen, learning to play the guitar and skateboarding. He wore clothes from Goodwill and a chain wallet. He was everything I wanted to be, and I adored him.

I don't know why he liked me as much as he did. Maybe it's because I was the cousin closest to his age. Maybe it's because I loved being around him, and would gladly be his interim best friend at any and all family functions. We were always sad on holidays when our families went to different places. At least, I was always sad, and I know that one time I heard someone else say that Jacob had been upset when we couldn't be together one Thanksgiving. That filled me with joy.

Knowing he loved me was one of the closest things on earth I've ever felt to the love of God. I knew he loved me, and I didn't know why. I only knew that I hadn't done anything to deserve it, and I certainly wasn't cool enough or funny enough or *anything* enough for him to want to be around me. Not that I thought Jacob was like God or anything. I just felt so honored to be loved by him at all.

And we had always had a blast together. Forming driveway hockey leagues and taking on his little brother's small group of friends, joking in the car on long trips, playing in the elevators during my sister's ballet recital, hunting for golf balls, rollerblading off of things and sometimes into things, singing songs from Disney movies and Christian rock bands. I counted the days until our families would next rendezvous. Getting out of baseball practice on that day in 1996, two days before school let out, I was already excited that his family was coming in that weekend for my sister's ballet recital.

When my dad mentioned an accident, I didn't know what he meant. I thought maybe Jacob had broken an arm or something. I sipped Diet Coke in the car as my dad explained to me that the Damoffs would not be coming to see us this weekend. He said Jacob had nearly drowned, and that he was in the hospital, and that he hadn't woken up yet. I was upset that he wouldn't be able to come see me that weekend. I hoped he would wake up soon so they could come anyway.

When I got home, my mom was in her room crying. I wasn't sure why, because at twelve years old, I wasn't sure if something bad had happened or not. But when she looked at me, I knew she expected me to cry, too. That's when I knew things were bad.

I saw Jacob in the hospital that weekend. His hair was long, and he was hooked up to all kinds of machines. My mom had always said she was going to cut his hair sometime while he was sleeping.

I don't know how many days passed before it began to dawn on me that he might not wake up. I knew he had to. The possibility that he wouldn't was absurd to me. I had never had a close relative die or anything like that. Jacob would wake up, and when he did we would be skateboarding within a few hours.

I cried that summer. A lot of times. Sometimes because I was scared, sometimes because I missed him, sometimes because the anxiety of waiting for him to wake up needed to flood out of my system. But I never grieved. He was always alive, three hours away at a hospital in Dallas. Inside of his living person was a mind that knew the code words to a hundred of our stupid clubs, a mind that could think of the cleverest comebacks every time, a mind that had thousands of memories very similar to my own, only his were documented from a slightly higher elevation and often faster speeds. So I always had hope that he would just wake up.

At some point in the middle of the summer, my mom came up to me while I was practicing basketball in the driveway. Some doctor had said that Jacob would be a vegetable for the rest of his life, she told me. I can't remember if she cried then. I know I did. Right there in my driveway. My child's mind had existed day to day until that point, always on the hope and prayer that he would wake up. And now some expert was sure enough that he wouldn't to bluntly announce the fact to his parents and anyone who might happen to love him.

It was God's grace that kept me together. Shortly afterward, I heard some amazing news. Again, my mom was the one who told me. My uncle George, Jacob's dad, had been holding

Jacob's hand. He had asked him to squeeze his hand, and he had. I was elated beyond belief when I heard. It was as though God had made it clear to me that Jacob could have been taken away completely, and then in His infinite goodness, He began to give him back.

Within the following weeks and months Jacob began to respond to people more and more. His brother, Luke, and I became very close friends, and when I was in town, we would visit him at the nursing home where he was staying and make him laugh by stumbling around the room in roller blades. For someone who had so recently been bent on praying that he would wake up completely, I was amazed at how happy I was just to hear Jacob laugh.

By Christmas, Jacob could walk with assistance. The next spring he began to be able to say words. His speech was limited, but he was talking. My cousin Jacob was restored to me. He may never skateboard again, but that was not why I loved him. That was just something I loved doing with him. The fact is, I thought he was gone, I was told that he was gone; and at that point, when there was nothing left to hope for within the confines of human existence, God gave me a miracle. Not the miracle I had asked for, but a miracle nonetheless.

Another incredible gift that I only recently began to fully comprehend was the friendship I have since developed with Luke, who was eleven at the time of the accident. Luke was always the third wheel in our adventures before, but Jacob's accident left the two of us clinging to each other. We cried together and laughed together, and over the years Luke has become in many ways my favorite person in the world. The memories I have of Jacob before his accident, the trials and blessings I have experienced since Jacob's accident, and the incredible experience of having a cousin for a beyond-best friend, all are shared with Luke. Not only did God not take Jacob away, but he also gave me a wonderful friend to help me through it.

It's a beautiful work of God that Luke doesn't function as a replacement. I was never forced to forget Jacob and move on to some other best friend somewhere else in a different sphere. God had put Luke there from the beginning, right there, knowing how much I would need him.

Jacob's life now is a testimony to me of perseverance. I know sometimes it is frustrating for him to be physically limited. I don't know what that's like, but I knew Jacob before his accident, and he was never easily daunted by anything. I don't know of course, but I can imagine that many people, such as myself, if put in Jacob's position, might never have even squeezed their dad's hand in the first place. As it is, Jacob is a joy to be around. His attitude is positive, and even in his moments of greatest frustration, he is always willing to smile and look me in the eye and say, "Yeah," no matter how feeble my words of encouragement might be.

I still pray for Jacob's total recovery. As I grow older, I learn more and more that God's will is frequently different than mine; and—because my will is tainted by sin—that is a very good thing. And I don't know much about heaven, but I do believe that the saints of God will be there in their sanctified states. Fear removed, feet unshackled, Jacob and I may very well skateboard one day on streets of gold. And I'm learning that I can wait for that if I have to. Until then, I am grateful that I can talk to him. That he can still make me laugh.

God gave me twelve joyful years with Jacob. Since the accident, I have had twelve powerful, and possibly more joyful, years with Jacob. God has given me an amazing friend in Luke Damoff. God has given me a good reason to pray. Growing up in a loving, comfortable Christian home I never knew how amazingly blessed I was. Now I do. More than anything, through all of this, God has shown me what incredible blessings he has heaped on my life. Nearly every tear I cried during the summer of 1996 was really a testimony to how good God had been to me before

that. And He has continued to be unduly gracious and kind to me far beyond what I could ever earn or deserve. In the only truly momentous thing that has ever happened to me, God taught me that He is faithful and that He is very good.

Philip Jones (Trinity Episcopal Church's former rector, who pulled Jacob out of the water)

On the day of Jacob's accident, we'd taken the eighth-grade kids to the lake for a canoe trip. They were playing in the water. When I joined them on the shore, people were asking about Jacob and Jeremy. Nobody knew where they were. We all called their names, but then I felt an impulse. It was as though God told me to get in the water and search. I took off my shirt and shoes. I was diving. I couldn't see anything, but I remember I dove near the bridge pilings. After a couple of dives, I felt a body. I grabbed and pulled it out.

When I got back to shore, I called, "I've got Jacob!" The kids were going crazy. I left him in the care of other adults who began CPR and then dove again to keep searching for Jeremy, but I couldn't find him. The whole thing was such a surreal experience. Like I didn't know what I'd done or why I'd done it.

Talking to the Damoffs at the hospital was very difficult for me, because we were close friends. Later that afternoon, many of the kids gathered at our house. My daughter, Cole, had been one of the students on the canoe trip. She, and many of the others who came over, had been close to Jacob. I remember talking to them—trying to help them sort out their feelings.

Four or five days later, I went to Jeremy's funeral. I was wearing so many hats . . . pastor, school representative, father. That morning it all sank in. I broke down. I called one of my best friends to pray for me.

In the days that followed, prayer seemed the thread running through everything. The whole church prayed. The entire Christian community in Marshall gathered around the Damoff family. From a pastor's perspective, this was huge. Until you're part of something like that, you don't know how the church will respond. It was amazing.

I had many great conversations with the Damoffs as they walked through this ordeal. I never saw any bitterness toward the church or the people who'd been at the lake. Jeremy rode in my canoe that day. All the kids had to wear lifejackets in the canoes. I remember Jeremy's telling me how he could swim. That was so ironic! Today I'm more careful on outings with kids.

The insurance settlement was a no-brainer. I'm so thankful for the way it met Jacob's needs. I don't think the Damoffs knew it, but Scott Baldwin helped initiate that. He was president of Trinity's school board and a plaintiff's lawyer. We both knew it was simply what we were supposed to do.

What do you do when something like this happens? You trust God, you pray, you hold vigil. It never leaves your memory. When I see any story or movie about drowning, it takes me back, not in a horrible way, but remembering how God has worked through Jacob and the Damoffs. The miraculous improvement! The pain is still there in my memories, but it's not debilitating. It's a memory of thankfulness to God for allowing me to help as much as I did, wishing I'd been able to do more. It was a unique experience spiritually. I've gone through it. I don't talk about it much. I know it changed me. It's tucked away and God uses it.

I have so much love and respect for Jeanne and George. I admired the way they walked, prayed, and hoped—a perspective that comes from a lifelong relationship with God. Their family had an impact on many lives. It still does.

Sue Werner (Jacob's youth minister)

We all have those markers in our lives, those things that change us forever. Jacob's accident was one for me. I remember receiving the phone call and having difficulty processing what I'd heard. My thoughts vacillated from "How can he make it after being under for so long?" to "Lord, how can he not make it?"

I went straight to the hospital. People were already lining the hallways and filling the waiting room. As the youth learned of the accident, they came—one by one or in small groups. They wanted to be close. No one could have kept them away. I remember their faces: shock, concern—their eyes searching for answers—tears flowing. Everyone asked the same question: "Is Jacob going to be alright?" They wanted to do something. We all felt helpless.

The nurses allowed me to go to Jacob's bedside. I had never seen anyone with so many machines and tubes attached to him. I talked to Jacob, hoping he could hear me. I prayed aloud over him, crying out to God on his behalf.

The youth wanted to know everything, every detail of what he looked like. The next day I took my camera and snapped a picture, which I gave to Jacob's parents years later. I never showed anyone that picture until I gave it to them. It was for me. It was my connection to Jacob. I looked at the picture when I prayed for him.

Youth group was difficult for everyone for a very long time. A part of us was missing. I saw a unique bond develop among the youth. I had always thought that group of kids cared about each other, but now it intensified. The depth of caring and expressing that care for each other magnified. Everything we did, everything we planned centered around thoughts of Jacob. We made a Jacob bulletin board in the youth room, where we posted news, placed old pictures of Jacob, and so forth. It was the first thing they would check when they came into the room, to see if something new had been added. Everyone had the liberty to add to it, so there was ownership of what was placed there.

I remember the numerous times we made yellow ribbons—sometimes with other youth groups—and posted them around town. It was important for the youth to be doing something for Jacob. They wanted to make a positive, visible statement to everyone that they had not given up hope.

In addition to the ribbons, our youth group wanted to do something just for themselves that would be a constant reminder to pray for Jacob. We made “prayer bead pins.” We put yellow beads onto safety pins and pinned them on our tennis shoe laces. Every time we put on our shoes we were reminded to pray. I still have mine.

When Jacob was transferred to Baylor, the kids felt disconnected. Many of them had not actually seen Jacob, but they’d known he was nearby when he was at the hospital in Marshall. Just hearing a report on him did not seem to be enough. So I took them to Baylor to see Jacob. I felt it was important that they see him, to help them feel more at peace with the situation. I don’t think I ever received as much gratitude over anything else we did as I received over that trip. It confirmed to me that it was something they really needed.

Everyone changed in some way, but there were a few specific people in whom I recall seeing the greatest change. Paul Fugler was never the same again. Paul and Jacob were so much a part of each other, their thoughts and actions fed off of one another. They were inseparable and hilarious. They certainly kept things fun and interesting. Paul was lost for a long period of time. He became quiet and more of an introvert. In time he developed relationships with some of the other guys, especially Joe Chastain, but it was never the same bond that he had with Jacob.

Stephanie Hillhouse was the girl that seemed to be most affected. She was an integral part of planning the yellow ribbon events, keeping things on the Jacob Board, and so forth. Her heart was broken and aching, and it was important therapy for her to be doing something. When Jacob was in the nursing home, I don't think she missed a day of going to see him. She would go all hours of the day or night, whenever she could. She took to heart the request to help Jacob by visiting him and reading to him. She truly gave sacrificially of herself and her time.

I remember going to the nursing home, reading to Jacob, the nurses getting me to help him exercise his legs. Those are precious memories that I cherish. And I'll never forget what happened after Jacob first started saying a few words. His mom asked him if he remembered who I was. He said, "Ms. Sue." Those words were the sweetest sound to my ears! My heart leaped with joy over what God was doing in his life.

I value life—especially the lives of my children and grandchild—to such a greater degree because of Jacob. I don't think I have ever witnessed any one single incident or person that has had the effect on so many lives that Jacob has had. His life has been a miracle of God that has been so far reaching . . . further than any one of us can imagine.

On numerous occasions I have shared portions of Jacob's story. And that's just one person spreading the good news. If you multiply that by the thousands who know the story, it is mind boggling! This is what can happen when one family allows God to use them in the midst of their deep pain.

Kirk Werner (our pastor at Evangelical Presbyterian Church at the time of Jacob's accident)

I have a short list of things that have happened throughout my life—major events that bring to light what is real and what is shadow. Or perhaps another way of putting it is these events helped me to get down to what really matters. They have the capacity to sift the petty and save what is pure.

I remember getting that phone call the afternoon Jacob drowned. I was stunned, almost in a daze as I rushed to the hospital. I remember meeting George there. Praying with him as they tended to Jacob. I was powerless to do anything other than to be there with my brother who was hurting. And as uncomfortable as that may have been (uncomfortable because I had no control whatsoever over the situation) that is what I was called to do . . . just be there.

This event was a lesson for me that I am not the "answer man." I don't think people really expect answers (that doesn't mean we won't ask why), but what we need most in times such as these is to be in the Lord's presence. We are called to be His body, and a part of that is being there for one another.

Our church had lots of opportunities to do that very thing when this happened to the Damoff family. I think that strengthened us all as a church. I witnessed a great outpouring of love and concern among the church family and particularly our youth.

Something that was really special for me was my visits with Jacob in the nursing home. This was back before he could speak, but we still communicated. When he progressed to the point that he could kick a beach ball in his room, we had a great time playing “soccer.” It was wonderful to see him do the things the doctors said he never would do. Granted, Jacob lost a great deal of his physical capabilities, but God has given him some precious gifts that will last forever. Gifts that are special and tailored just for Jacob.

I still don't know why God allows some things to happen. And that's OK . . . more than OK. That is the way it should be, because God is God and I am not! I love the analogy of the woven tapestry. Our perspective is from the back of the extensive needlework. All we see is a gnarled mess of threads. But God's perspective is from the front, which displays a beautiful work of art.

Faith is trusting God in all things. He has promised us that He will always be with us. If we learn through these hard times, we will know that His presence is enough. I have found that I can make do without a lot of things. But the sole necessity of life is His presence.

I feel woefully inadequate to try to communicate the full impact all of this has had on me, my family, and my ministry. In closing, I do want to say it has deepened my appreciation for each new day and encouraged me to treasure the close relationships God has given me, even those that transcend time and space.

Mary Carlile, M.D. (the head of Jacob's medical team at Baylor Institute of Rehabilitation)

I remember very distinctly how ill Jacob was when he came to us. He showed signs of sepsis (systemic infection), and due to the close proximity of the sinuses to the brain, I was sure that meningitis was the next phase we would face. I called in other specialists—an infectious disease specialist, an ear nose and throat specialist, and most importantly a pediatric neurologist to assist in Jacob's care and to help me give the Damoffs a realistic prognosis for his survival. I remember trying to gently prepare them for what we all thought was inevitable—his death.

Most vividly, I remember the response of Jeanne and George. They were grief stricken, but completely able to put Jacob's life in God's hands. They were willing to give him up if that was His will. I remember Jeanne's telling me of a worship service they attended in Dallas during which tears were streaming down her face, but the strength of her faith never left her.

During times of crisis and life-threatening illness, it is common for people to seek God and invoke His help. Usually, it is "Lord, let Thy will be done, but let it be the following. . . ." To most, their faith is only for a positive outcome. Instead of hollow "God talk" as my chaplain calls it, it was obvious to Jacob's treatment team that the Damoffs were the "real McCoy." While tragic, it was uplifting to see how completely and utterly they trusted that the ordained outcome would be for the best.

Jacob struck everyone who saw him at BIR as an angel-like figure. He appeared beautiful and fragile at that time. He gradually but definitively "turned the corner" as one serious complication after another was faced and overcome. By the time he left us, he was even showing some early responses to his favorites—his family.

I know the Damoffs continued to have many more difficult months and years, and I credit their commitment and love with the triumph Jacob has achieved. Never, however, in my wildest dreams did I think he would improve to his current functional status. When he *walked* off the elevator at our hospital many months later for a visit, our staff was overwhelmed. We are accustomed to seeing people improve, but we considered the recovery we had witnessed in Jacob a true miracle.

To this day, I refer to Jacob's story when I'm speaking to families about the limitations of doctors and the medical world in being able to predict recovery or demise. We do our best to use the knowledge and scientific treatments we have to foster recovery, but the final result is truly not in our hands. I believe that sharing Jacob's story with other families allows them to hold on to hope.

"Jacob's Song" has also been a blessing to the staff, families, and patients at BIR and beyond. [Debbie Boatright-Camacho] came and sang it to our patients. It struck a common emotional chord in those suffering from all nature of disabilities. In my own life, my mother has been bedfast for the past five years due to multiple sclerosis. A strong Christian, she has been courageous as her life has taken on very small dimensions. She has some depression; however, when she feels the sadness overtaking her, she plays "Jacob's Song" and is able to let go of the burdens. His story inspires her to turn it over to the Lord and place it in His hands. We leave the CD in the player at all times.

In summary, those of us who were fortunate to know Jacob at BIR will never forget him. He continues to be an example of hope to patients and families undergoing critical injuries and illness. His life has been a shining example to our staff.

**Debbie Boatright-Camacho (former student at ETBU and composer of
“Jacob’s Song”)**

Arriving home after an exhausting day at the university, I found myself in a rather less-than-chipper mood. Our house was in great need of attention, assignments were due, and I had completely run out of clean clothes to wear. I dropped about thirty pounds of books on the floor, fell to my knees, and began an attempt at a weary prayer. “God, I’m tired—family, church, school, my music, our home—I need help.”

Before I could release the words, the thought of Jacob and his family entered my mind. Quickly, my petty whines turned to brokenness. Tears filled my eyes as I thought about the pain that he and his family must be going through. How insignificant my problems became as an abundant amount of compassion overwhelmed my heart.

As tears fell, I began to whisper out a prayer. I stumbled over the words to present to God. Almost at the mention of Jacob’s name, lyrics began to fill my mind. I ripped out a page from a class notebook, grabbed my guitar, and began to play and write. It seemed as though the music just appeared behind the lyrics—like heaven had already written *this* song. Rarely do I experience such infinite stillness and internal isolation when composing. It felt as if the world halted momentarily that I might receive clearly the perfect words. “Jacob’s Song” was truly a divine gift.

Via the “Visions of Love” CD, the song has literally traveled all over the world. I have been told that it was even translated into Russian. A missionary there returned to tell me that many had been blessed by the message in the song. I’ve lost count of the comments and letters I’ve received with similar regards.

A short time after sharing the song with the family, Jeanne began to tell me about a prayer she prayed for those who prayed for Jacob. For all those who mentioned Jacob's name to God, she asked that God would simply "meet them wherever they are." How amazingly unselfish and humanly uncharacteristic for a family to desire that God would use their pain as an opportunity for Him to touch others' lives! I know, with no uncertainty, that when I mentioned Jacob's name to God, the heavens opened up and He met me right there on my knees . . . with "Jacob's Song."

Amy Barron Pecory (ETBU student who lived with the Damoffs in 1997)

I was in Mr. Damoff's office when he received a phone call that Jacob had been in an accident. I remember the look on his face and the bad feeling I got in my stomach. I could tell the accident was serious. Things began happening so fast, the exam I had taken that day was forgotten, along with the other petty things we were discussing.

I went to the hospital. I saw Jeanne as she arrived, and I remember the concern in her eyes. Being a mother, I can't imagine what she was thinking. I watched the two parents embrace and begin to pray for Jacob. I remember that struck me as incredible. I know we are taught to take our burdens to God, but their faith seemed like such a foreign thing to me at that moment.

I was so consumed by my feelings that I hadn't thought to pray. I left the hospital not knowing Jacob's accident would have a profound effect on my life. I believe that was the beginning of an incredible time of learning for me. Over the course of the next few months, I witnessed a family show amazing strength. I learned that the Damoffs truly gave their burdens to the Lord. They showed me that in Him we can face any of life's hurdles. Without Him we cannot survive.

I witnessed family and friends praying at all times. But I also witnessed their lives. I noticed they weren't just prayerful, they were faithful. I have experienced tragedy in my life before, and never have I seen people more committed to accepting God's will for their lives. I am sure there were times of doubt, especially when Jacob was in Dallas at Baylor. But I was comforted by the clarity of their faith.

On numerous occasions I heard Mr. Damoff share his faith with other families in crisis. Although I don't know the outcomes of those conversations, I believe it was significant that he was able to share Christ's love and comfort with others while his child was so incredibly ill. That not only challenged me to be more open about my faith, but it challenged my faith. Would I be able to allow God to work through me if a loved one were so desperately ill? Where did my faith lie? I am a student of science. If I know that the brain can only withstand so much trauma, can I believe with my mind and my spirit that God can heal such a person?

I struggled during those months with my lack of faith. I spent a lot of time evaluating what I believed and to what extent. I was building a foundation for my faith that has been relevant to my growth as a Christian. Though I was not raised in a home where Scripture was taught, I began to search the Word for instances where God fulfilled His promises.

I found promises that applied to Jacob's situation. Although I had heard these words before, they didn't become "real" until this point in my walk with Christ: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me" (John 14:1 NIV) and "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5 NIV).

Jacob continued to teach me about perseverance through hardship as he improved while staying in the nursing facility in Marshall. I had the opportunity of participating in his therapy. I

spent time reading to him and rubbing his arms and legs with textured gloves. Each day held new challenges for Jacob. His passion to overcome motivated me to have a passion in my life as well. Because of Jacob, I do not take my days for granted. I realize all the blessings God has given me today might be gone tomorrow. When you realize how brief our time on earth is, you become acutely aware of our purpose here. I began to understand that God had a specific plan for my life and I needed to pursue it with the same passion that Jacob was pursuing his recovery.

During the time I lived with the Damoff family I learned more than I could possibly put into words. I had the unique experience of seeing Jacob's progress and the wonderful little things that happened to keep his family and me encouraged about his possibilities.

Jacob definitely has a strong will. I remember at one point we thought his progress had hit a plateau. He was jumping on the trampoline with Mr. Damoff. We were all standing around watching him laugh. For me, it was just wonderful to see Jacob smile again and to know that he was enjoying himself.

When they took a break from jumping, I said, "Jacob, if you want to jump some more, say 'Mom.'" He looked at Mrs. Damoff and spoke. I don't think he had said anything since his accident. It was a defining moment for me. God gives us little tidbits of His incredible love for us when we least suspect it. God gave me a sneak peek at what He would accomplish. That is when I knew with God *all* things are possible. Not just the things we think should be or could be possible, but all things.

It is an amazing moment in your life when you realize that the Lord is in your presence. He watches over all that goes on, and when you least expect it, He gives you a beautiful sunset or a refreshing shower or a few words from a boy who hasn't spoken in a year. He is full of surprises.

That is such an incredible thing to realize. I continued to be amazed by God's power over Jacob's circumstances. He was able to learn to swallow, eat, walk, and talk again.

As I said, I learned so many things while living with the Damoffs. Each member of their family was able to teach and influence me each day I lived with them. I felt like a sponge soaking up all of the godly wisdom that this family shared with me. If I had to narrow it down to one truth that I took from that experience, I guess it would be that God is in control.

He is in control of our circumstances when we submit to Him and when we choose to try to handle things on our own. The only difference is the outcome. I was able to witness a family wholly submit to God's will for their lives. It is an incredible act of obedience that I attempt to mimic each day. I was able to witness a family rejoicing in God's infinite power, even in the face of such a terrible tragedy. I was able to witness a boy defy many limitations that modern medicine claimed he would never overcome. I witnessed faith that was childlike and submissive to God's control. I witnessed a family truly living in faith. And it is a lifestyle that I continue to strive for each day of my life.

Joanna Blackwelder (mother of Jake, the boy who drowned one year after Jacob)

Thinking about how God used Jacob and the Damoff family in our lives, the one thing that keeps coming to mind is hope. I remember so clearly how confused Mark and I were after Jake's accident. We had so many questions about coma. What level would Jake come out of it? What would this injury mean to Jake's quality of life? How would this affect the other children? What would be the best way Mark and I could help Jake?

I remember specifically asking George and Jeanne many of these questions, knowing now, of course, they didn't have the answers. But what they did share with us were their experiences with Jacob, their faith that God would see them through, and an assurance that, where there is love, there is joy and happiness no matter the circumstance.

Mark and I left there with hope. The Damoff family was God's tool to show us that no matter how many unknowns there are, no matter how many questions left unanswered, God will provide a way for a family that loves Him and loves each other.

And I remember something else equally important. I remember meeting Jacob, seeing his smiling face, and thinking, *God, if my son can have that same joy that is living in Jacob, then I know it will be alright.*

Our sons' accidents were just a year apart, on the same day and so similar in nature that I still get chills thinking about it. Jacob was doing so well that he didn't need his wheelchair anymore, and it had his name—my son's name—on the seat. All those little things were God's provision of hope. Yes, Mark and I left there feeling not so alone and with a renewed hope God would walk with us through all the uncharted territory just as He was doing with the Damoff family. I don't think Mark and I ever thanked the Damoffs properly for that visit. I offer our gratitude now.

Rusty Mauldin (Jacob's aide since 1997)

Working with Jacob has changed my whole outlook. Everything has more meaning. Being around the Damoffs is like being around angels. I've learned more in the past ten years than in the twenty previous ones. Now I know life is about people and taking care of them. It's not about what I want.

God was not important to me before. I was wrapped up in material things. Then I saw the Damoffs' lifestyle, and that's how I wanted to be. I needed to change mentally, to focus less on the material and more on spiritual matters. It's not about what I have.

Before their influence, I worried about my appearance. I wanted to show off—impress people with external things. Now I don't care about that. Before, I worried about clothes, hair, what I drove. I was worldly. I realize now how shallow I was. Now I'm focused on responsibility. Before, I wanted to turn heads. Now I couldn't care less about that. I care about what God wants me to do and think about.

Working with Jacob changed my whole attitude. Even with all their problems, the Damoffs were "carefree." They worked together as a team. Watching them, I learned to share and work with others. I've learned that it's better to be in unity, to work with those in your life. Before, I'd get mad at my wife and kids and refuse to work things out. Now I work through things with them. I see what's truly important. I got that from watching the Damoffs.

The other day my uncle said, "Girls are nothing but trouble." It made me mad. And I thought, "It's not true. Look at Grace." It's how you raise them—the way you interact with your children. I'm learning not to worry about my children, because I see the Damoffs trusting God even after this happened. I want to be involved in my kids' lives. I've seen how relationships can work. I've seen the values that I want lived out in the Damoffs.

I can honestly say, working with Jacob has changed my whole life. Before coming to work for the Damoffs, I'd always been short on patience and quick tempered. With Jacob, I had to try to understand. I had to have patience to make my job work, and I soon realized I needed it in other areas of my life as well. I see a difference in how I relate to my family. I realized I *wanted*

to be patient, because I cared about Jacob and his family. I've learned to carry that into all my relationships. I don't take things for granted anymore. Now I know each day is a gift. Anything can happen, so I appreciate the people and the good things in my life.

Working with Jacob has shown me I want to help people. I've become a "people person." As hard-headed as Jacob is, being able to accomplish things with him has taught me I can have influence. I now realize I want to be a teacher, to help others as I've helped Jacob.

The Damoffs have taught me to remain positive—not to give up. Sometimes I worry, but I realize that, if something bad happens, you can work through it. Every day when I wake up, I look for the good in whatever circumstances I'm in. When bad things happen, I know there's good somewhere. I always look for the positive. There's Something beyond me. It's easy to lose focus, but when you feel Someone helping you through, you get back on track. I've watched God carry the Damoffs through. I know He will carry me, too.

Allan Thompson (interim pastor at Evangelical Presbyterian Church for a ten-month period in 1999 and 2000)

I was the interim pastor at Jacob's church for a period of ten months. As a friend of the Damoff family, I had known the children for a number of years, and my sons had formed friendships with them as well. I was there at the hospital the day Jacob was brought in from the drowning, both to pray for the family and to encourage the fledgling rector of Trinity Episcopal Church, Philip Jones. Many of the area clergy were also there that day.

I say that as background for this incident. After accepting the position of interim pastor, I was privileged to lead out in my first Communion time with the congregation. In this church the

elders stood behind prayer railings that lined the stage and administered the elements to those who came forward and kneeled. The pastor stood behind the central altar, and usually the ones who came to him were those who either could not kneel or needed special assistance.

I had served a few of the older members when I saw Jacob coming up to the altar. I wondered what needs he would have, but I saw his sister accompanying him and hoped she would take the lead. Jacob could grasp the bread and the cup but needed someone to help him get the juice to his mouth without spilling it.

I watched with mild interest until the name of his sister came to mind—Grace.

Then I thought, *Grace is enabling a child of God to enjoy the presence of God when he could not in his own strength.* I ceased to watch with interest and realized I was having a sermon acted out in front of my eyes. It was a deep revelation to me of what grace has been in my life, and it has stayed with me as one of the greatest single moments of worship I have ever experienced.

Since that time I have rejoiced with the family in watching Jacob progress in many ways. He is a remarkable young man whom God continues to use as a witness to many of His love . . . and His grace.

Mary Jones (long-time member of Evangelical Presbyterian Church)

Had it been up to us, I am sure none of us would have chosen the events that involved Jacob some years ago. But God in His wisdom and love saw the beauty that would unfold from what we all considered a tragedy at the time. Because we know God's ways are not our ways, we can accept what happened to Jacob and find good in it.

The subsequent metamorphosis that has taken place in Jacob has been awesome to all of us who have watched. Witnessing his emergence from the cocoon of death, waiting as his wings dried, and then watching him fly into the wind has been a beautiful thing. As Jacob tries those wings of independence and trust, our hearts are warmed by his quick smile and winsome personality, his lifting of his hands in praise, and his courage and successes.

I sometimes wonder, *What would our part of the body be like without Jacob just as he is?* I am afraid we would not be as forgiving and accepting. We wouldn't desire to be more like the Jesus we see in Jacob.

It is hard to put into words all that Jacob's ordeal has done to bring encouragement, hope, and the grace and love of the sovereign God into our hearts. It is wonderful to know God loves us with such an incomprehensible love that He will not permit anything to come into our lives that He doesn't want to use for our good and His glory. We all probably have had questions why this accident would have happened to a vibrant, Christian young man. In retrospect I feel it was, in part, to mold, refine, and shape us more into the image of Christ as we united our hearts and prayers of faith for Jacob.

Being part of Jacob's experience has given me a lot for which to be thankful. I've seen God's grace played out in each member of the Damoff family. I've seen Jacob's transformation from an ordinary teen to an extraordinary young man whose relationship with Jesus is enviable. I've seen God's continued provision, day by day, for all the unique needs the Damoff family has faced. And I've witnessed Jacob's metamorphosis, which gives hope to many and makes our lives much richer. God is faithful.

Natalie Dowd Grubbs (Jacob's best friend)

Before Jacob's accident, I leaned on him in so many ways. He was my best friend, and the person I went to for advice on any topic. Although years ago now, I still remember writing in my journal: "Jacob will not always be here. I must put my trust in the Lord."

Though that specific entry dealt more with Jacob's plans to leave our private school and attend public after ninth grade, the truth applied to every circumstance in my life. I had to choose to trust the Lord in everything. Not long after I wrote that entry, Jacob drowned.

Losing Jacob made me want to protect everyone I loved. I wanted to keep them in my sight. I wanted to control events to prevent anything bad from happening to them. I wanted to take care of them.

I decided to be a nurse because of what I went through with Jacob. It was the caring for people—not the science—that drew me. I wanted to be the kind of nurse who reaches out to everyone involved in tragedy. I don't remember any nurses asking me how *I* was handling the tragedy that struck my best friend. I decided to become that nurse.

I work in labor and delivery, and the other night I was talking with one of my patients. She shared with me that she had lost her first baby. After having her second child, she'd had a hard time allowing her daughter to do anything on her own.

I understood her tendencies more than I wanted to. I told her about my own desire to control things because my experience with Jacob hurt so badly. But then I began telling her all the amazing things God did in and through Jacob, and I realized I don't need to try to be in control. I don't even want to be in control. Whatever God does will be good. As I encouraged this woman to trust God with her daughter, I realized I needed to do the same with the people in my life.

What God continues to show me is that He is sovereign. It wasn't until recently that I realized what that meant. My alarm clock doesn't wake me up in the morning. God does. Gravity doesn't pull me back to the earth, but rather the Lord. I have been taught so much science that I sometimes forget the truth I base my life upon.

I cannot control one thing. I realize I am not promised my husband forever, a comfortable life, or healthy children. Even after such a profound experience of God's mercy years ago, I still desire to control my life. But I'm learning more and more that God is sovereign. Nothing will ever happen outside His loving plan.

I now have a sweet child of my own, Lawson Jacob (after Jacob, of course). Often as I am rocking him at night, I think of Jacob and his mother. As I hold him, I do not know his future. And I am thankful. The pain that might lie ahead would be unbearable. But what I have learned is to trust God with open hands. Lawson is given to me as a gift to care for, but not to idolize. I must hold on loosely, and yet while doing so, I have also learned to cherish every moment that he is with me in this life.

I'll never forget Jacob. My memories will never be erased. Now, all these years later, I still think of Jacob often and pray for his continued healing. And I trust God that all things will work for good in his life and in mine.

George Damoff (Jacob's father)

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1).

Psalm 22 is a mysterious and miraculous poem. It prophetically reveals, in intimate detail, the anguish of God the Son as He struggles against faithless forces in the world. It seemed that

God the Father had forsaken Him, that His audible groans were unheard, and that His hope for a good, productive life would be futile. The depths of sorrow recorded in the psalm, however, are superseded by the ultimate triumph of His strength over the circumstance of His cruel, yet redemptive, death.

The strength of rushing water dislodges anything that lacks a strong, steadfast anchor. Jacob's near drowning on the afternoon of May 23, 1996 was a catastrophic deluge that inundated my faith in a good Creator. Yet, by the kind intention of God, He desired to reveal in a most intimate manner that He is Strength greater than all earthly powers—that He is, indeed, *my* Strength.

The day when Jacob, against his will, was pulled down into the murky water, I was pulled, against my will, into a turbulent struggle against hopelessness and despair. Overwhelmed by my wrestling with this raging current, I scarcely could see the struggles of the rest of my family (Jeanne, Grace, and Luke)—let alone attempt to help them. Even so, God, in kindness, covered my many weaknesses and met their needs.

From the moment I received that first phone call from the Trinity Episcopal secretary, life became a paradox. My survival depended on trust in God, yet He was the very One who had allowed this horrible event to occur. Do all believers who seek to find meaning in their suffering wrestle with this irony? Does the confusion caused by this paradox lead many to a bitterness of soul, a pursuit of understanding that leaves them gasping for air? Is it through this mystery that our Creator chooses to draw us into a greater experience of His grace?

Confronted with cruel circumstances, at first I had to choose to trust God from one minute to the next. Over time I learned to abide in trust for hours, days, weeks, and months. Pain and sorrow thrust me on my God. My Redeemer became my Strength.

Jacob has been miraculously raised from the dead. Although the scars of this turmoil are still evident, the cruel waters mysteriously transformed my son into a redemptive blessing for many. Who am I to resist the ways of God the Father with His children? I yield to God the Holy Spirit to guide my thoughts in order to understand His purposes that allow evil, destructive events. I choose to follow the Son of God through a world that is antagonistic to the faith that leads to life—the faith that enables me to trust in a good Creator.

As God the Son trusted His Father in Psalm 22, so I trust that the LORD God has intended goodness to emerge from the waters that *almost* destroyed Jacob, as well as me and my family. The LORD God is near us. He hears prayers weakly whispered from pain and sorrow, and by His strength He takes the fragile hope of those who trust Him and transforms it into good, productive lives.

I will tell of Your name to my brethren;

In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

You who fear the LORD, praise Him;

All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,

And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.

For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;

Nor has He hidden His face from him;

But when he cried to Him for help, He heard. (Psalm 22:22–24)