

**A JOURNAL
OF
REDEMPTION**

By Ron DeHaas

1:00 A.M. August 21, 1992

"Ray," a truck driver for Interstate Chemical leaves his terminal in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to drop off his loads of kerosene in Detroit, and then Battle Creek, Michigan. At age 44, he had made this run many times. Even though he was returning from a vacation, he expected this to be a normal trip, just as all the other trips had been...

9:45 A.M. August 21, 1992, the "Before which" and the "After which" are the two halves of my existence on earth. The moment would also define the two halves of trucker Ray's life. Minutes before, my wife Pat (age 34) and our two children, Ann (age 7) and Stephen (age 4), were traveling to Battle Creek, Michigan, on Interstate 94. They stopped for an accident ahead, and traffic was backed up for about a mile. After being stopped for about 30 seconds, a tanker truck, carrying kerosene, never slowed down and hit them from behind at highway speed. Their gasoline tank exploded, and they were killed instantly. By noon, police were able to get close enough to identify the vehicle. By 4 P.M., the state police had obtained the help of my pastor and a friend, who found me at work and told me of the news in the conference room at my office. So begins this journal.

As I look back, I see that God has dealt with me in unusual ways. I have read numerous books on the process of grieving, but I see that my reactions to my tragic loss have not been typical. For instance, the books I've read all indicate that the grieving process includes a stage of denial. If I went through that stage, it was in the first hours after learning of the accident. But those hours were more characterized by shock than denial. A psychologist once told me that I have a strong ability to analyze myself. I feel that God has used that strength to help me recover from my loss. My reaction to my loss was also strongly influenced by my unusually strong relationship with Pat, Ann, and Stephen. But mostly, my reaction was a result of my strong relationship with God through Jesus Christ, before the accident ever happened.

If you know Christ as your Savior, I hope you are encouraged by the great things God has done even from this tragedy. If you do not have a personal relationship with Christ, I hope you will consider the remarkable (and otherwise unexplainable) strength that God has given me through this ordeal.

If there is a message in this journal, it is that there is a God who reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ and in the text of the Bible, and we can be thankful that He is in control, and that we are not...

Ron DeHaas

4:00 P.M. August 21, 1992

Like Job in the Old Testament, I "fell to the ground." I remember loosening my tie, and it was nearly an hour before I got up, before any words were said.

Shock. Mike (Mike Donahue, my pastor) drove me to Pat's folks' house, which was nearly two hours away, and both of us were in shock. And we both knew it. We had two hours in the car, and talked about little else besides theology. The few times I turned the subject to the matter at

hand, the drive became unsafe, and we turned back to theology. It was a safe hiding place, an outlet, even enjoyable. I started hyperventilating as we drove the final few miles.

I had already contacted Pat's two brothers, Bob and Paul. Paul, a Pastor in Minnesota, was making arrangements to come immediately, but Bob was able to come to Pat's folks' house by late evening. I got there first, and I told Pat's mom and dad about the accident. Brother Bob (Pat's older brother) started praying, "We love you, Jesus." The Holy Spirit started praying for us all, as we sat mostly in silence.

August 22

Shock, drive home, more theology. The shock stayed, but reality became real. I had a very real sense that God wrapped me up in swaddling clothes and protected me from the bitter cold. Today, I must have done some things, like funeral arrangements, etc., but, as though covered by an ethereal veil, memories of the day have disappeared.

Sunday, Aug. 23

Bob, his wife Linda, and Pat's mom and dad made their way west toward Marshall, Michigan, where I lived, from the Detroit area, for visiting hours at the funeral home. I just can't imagine the sensation that they had when they walked into Big Boy in Albion (10 miles from Marshall) and saw our family portrait in full color in the newspaper rack. The headline on the Battle Creek Enquirer was, "She, her children, are in heaven." It was the news of the day.

Monday, Aug. 24

Funeral day. Still wrapped in swaddling clothes but the shock was pretty well gone. We sang "How Great Thou Art" and also sang "Let there be Praise" - that song had come to be known as "Ann's song" in our church because my daughter Ann would always choose that song when given the chance. I don't think I'll ever be able to sing it again without a tear in my eye. Thank God for my two counselors, Pat's brother Paul and his wife Renae, who lived with me most of the week. My sister Sylvia, a self-proclaimed atheist, was also a tremendous help, but she couldn't relate to those swaddling clothes. There had to be a war going on in her mind.

Just before the funeral, TV3 from Kalamazoo conducted an interview with me, aired on the 6:00 news. During the interview, I mentioned that I was glad to have Pat's rings returned, that the diamond was the most perfect diamond we could find to symbolize what we expected to be a perfect marriage, which it was. My dear friend (and fellow geologist) Bob Brady was the only one who mentioned to me that he picked up on the significance of my (trained geologist's) assessment of the diamond's quality. Each diamond is rated on its cut, the number of crystallographic imperfections, and the color. All contribute to a perfect diamond's brilliant adamantine luster.

As I look on my marriage and my family, that's the memory I have, one of brilliant adamantine luster.

Tues. Aug. 25

Meltdown. I described my feelings with that word. I've been asked what I mean, but the wrench of grief is a universe away from verbal description. Grief defines itself, exists by itself, and embraces all things, even itself.

Today, in Tuesday's Enquirer, there was absolutely the most amazing newspaper article I've ever seen. There on the front page of the Battle Creek Enquirer were quoted several verses from Proverbs Chapter 31. The headline Sunday had read "She, Her Children Are In Heaven." A number of people have asked, "How do you know they are in Heaven?" That's the easy part. It is a common belief that you need to "do" something to earn your way to Heaven. If that was the case, then we'd never know for sure that we are going there; we'd always be wondering, "Am I good enough? Did I 'do' enough?" But the Bible makes it clear that there is nothing we can do to earn our way to Heaven. Instead, it is God who performs the task; since God is in control, it is He who saves us. As 1 Peter tells us (1:3), it is He who causes us to be born into a new nature, a nature in which we are enabled to believe and have faith. Truly, it is that faith in Jesus Christ which saves us. As Jesus Himself declared, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). It's such a simple message, even four-year old Stephen knew it, but it's such a profound message, the world, apart from Christ, can't believe it. But I know Pat, Ann, and Stephen are in Heaven right now because I know they believed.

Saturday Aug. 29

A bunch of guys, including my boss, Stuart, came over and painted my basement and moved furniture from the basement to Stephen's room. At a loss for words, everybody has been looking for something they could do for me, and painting the basement was an enormous job that Pat had started. I discussed with Mike today about how close God came to me this week. Like my friend Jeff Minniear sang at the funeral, His grace is greater than my need. Mike commented that when he comes into my house, he almost feels like he should take off his shoes because he's walking on holy ground. He said that you almost expect to see His footprints on the ground when you look outside, or at the carpet, His presence was so overwhelming.

Monday, Aug. 31

My first night by myself. Paul and Renae, and my sister Sylvia were all gone. I wander aimlessly from room to room, as though I'm looking for something, but then forget what I was looking for. Confused, can't concentrate. I later read that this is almost universal, to wander around. "Looking for the lost loved ones," so they say. This wandering lasted about a week.

Tuesday, Sept. 1

Last night I had my first nightmare. I guess probably because it was my first night alone. It was a horrible dream, with a scene I'll likely always remember.

While mowing the lawn, I was reminded of Stephen. He loved riding the tractor with me. I noticed that I had a choice, a decision. I could choose to be sorry for myself when I think of Pat, Ann, or Stephen at times like this. Or I can choose to remember the joy that Stephen brought me, and how much I loved riding the tractor with Stephen. It wasn't much of a choice. I had to smile.

Wed. Sept 2

Today I met with Barry Goldstein. He is a private investigator whom my attorney hired to investigate the accident. Barry was moved by my story, but did not seem to be so moved by my faith. But then I told him that my God is the God of Israel, the same God that opened the Red Sea for his people, the same God who to this day has protected the nation of Israel from multiple holocausts over the centuries, but has returned them (in 1948) to their promised homeland. That

seemed to get his attention.

Friday, Sept. 4

A low point. I was forcing myself to go into work (I only ended up being able to work for a few hours), and couldn't cope. I had to remind myself that God was real, but still had a hard time recollecting how close He was only a week before. I asked Him for some encouragement, some guidance, some indication of what my new life was going to be. I was asking Him what I should do now. On the way to work, I realized that I had not recently been listening to the local Christian radio station, Family Life Radio. Very often in the past, I have received great encouragement and answers to prayer from this radio station.

Sometimes the answers to prayers come instantly, and that's what I was looking for now. So as I turned the radio on, I instantly recognized the speaker, Chuck Swindoll. What he said in the first 15 seconds after I turned it on was (paraphrasing him) "if you've lost your wife and children because of death, the first thing you need to do is turn toward God." I was so stunned that I couldn't drive. I pulled off the highway in tears, and sat in amazement at how God answered my prayer.

It's such a little thing, a sentence on a radio. Why are we amazed when He hears our thoughts? Which is the greater feat, to walk on water or to give eternal life?

Wednesday, Sept. 9

Tried to work, only lasted a half hour. This was my last day at work.

Friday, Sept. 11

Dave Wilson, an old friend from Pennsylvania, flew in to visit. I relived the whole thing with him, which made it even more real to me. He helped me realize that grieving is a process, a long process. As I talk with him, I recognize that Christian growth is a process, a long process. I feel blessed that I was well into that process by August 21, 1992. If I was not so far along in that process, I perhaps would not have survived.

While talking with Dave, he questioned my belief that only faith in Christ could save a person. He said, "Aren't Hindus and Muslims worshipping the same god as Christians?" Well, no they're not. In Christ's own words (John chapter 14), He said, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." Only through faith in Christ can we enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You might as well be worshipping trees as the Romans did as worship the gods of the other religions of the world.

I have had several opportunities this week to tell people of my faith. Other friends were intrigued how I could be doing so well. God's protection continues to be very real...

Thursday, Sept. 17

When I woke up, I cried for over an hour. My throat was soar for days afterwards. I kept on crying while I showered and dressed. Then, typical of God's overwhelming presence these weeks, I received a very uplifting call from friends who had been reading the Bible since I visited them on Labor Day. Anyway, it was a very uplifting conversation, just what I needed. I felt a physical rush from the encouragement I received from that conversation. From the valley to the peak.

Saturday, Sept. 19

A good friend took me to the U of M game. It was nice to get out and do something that was fun like that. Nevertheless, at times I wanted to stop the crowd and have them mourn with me.

After the game, we went to the violin store to take back Ann's violin (she had started lessons). I had called ahead, so I didn't need to do any explaining once I got there. But even so, both my friend and I had tears in our eyes. I wish it was that convenient to return all the other things that were theirs. What am I going to do with the pictures, the toys, Stephen's special foods, Ann's teeth? And what about the things that friends gave us that say "Patty and Ron, November 6, 1982" or the Delft tiles that Renae gave us with Stephen's and Ann's birthdate and birthplace on them? One thing for sure, I'm not ready to give them up yet. They're too much a part of my life still.

Bob and Linda sent me a box of cookies and a book. The cookies didn't last long, but the book was amazing. Andre Thornton had an experience very similar to mine, and wrote of the closeness to God that I felt, and the comfort he found in the Bible, particularly Philippians. It seems every time I open a book or turn on the radio, I hear verses from Philippians.

Monday, Sept. 21

Dinner with another long-time friend in Chelsea. He asked a number of questions about my faith. One question he asked was if my faith has gotten stronger since this happened. I explained to him that my faith hasn't gotten stronger, it was this strong going into this tragedy. It's because my faith is strong that I am able to survive this. I tried to relate, and I think he understood me, that it is important to develop faith "now" to prepare for the future, for death faces us all. Illness and trials and tribulations face all of us in our futures, and the only way we really have of preparing for them in this world is to develop a strong faith during the times that God prospers us. He also asked me whether people who have never heard of Christ have the opportunity to get to Heaven. He referred, for instance, to the American Indians. The human side of me would like to answer, "Well, of course they would be given the opportunity." But the fact is that salvation is God's doing, not mine. If God chooses to reveal himself to someone, even if that person is completely out of touch with Christians, He will do so. He is God, after all. He calls the shots. We sinners down here have no right to tell a perfectly just God how to run His universe.

As Paul quoted from Pat's Bible at the funeral (Heb. 11), "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."

Tuesday, Sept. 22

It is striking to me how almost everybody is dealing, still dealing, with grief from their past. Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, sons and daughters, grief comes in all shapes and sizes. People are sharing that with me now, and I hope I never again underestimate the grief that others feel.

Sept. 23, 1992

The thought came to my mind that it is possible for God to reverse this. If I pray fervently, God could really have me wake up from a dream to find that Pat and Ann and Stephen are still alive.

But immediately the thought that came to my mind was that then the message that has gone out to many others would be lost. Would I be willing to trade God's work and plans regarding my friends' salvation for the return of my family? All of the man in me resented what the Holy Spirit said for me, "Would that this cup could pass from me, but Thy will be done."

Reading Wolterstoffs "Lament for a Son." His son died while hiking. He says, "Each death is as unique as each life... We say, 'I know how you are feeling.' But we don't." One thing about the uniqueness of what I've experienced is that nobody has told me they know how I'm feeling. On the contrary, they all say, "I can't imagine what you're going through." What makes me cry is that neither can I.

Other quotes of Wolterstorff:

"The pain of the no more outweighs the gratitude of the once was." I guess I agree, but God's grace tips the balance so that the pain of the no more is about the same as the sum of grace plus gratitude.

"When we gather now there's always someone missing, his absence as present as our presence, his silence as loud as our speech... When we're all together, we're not all together." "I lament all that might have been, and now will never be."

"I see nothing...no smile, no sturdy step, no bright intelligence, no silhouette, no love embodied. Where he should be, I stare straight through. Turn it back. Stop the clock and turn it back... Let us all do it right." I multiply that times three.

Besides Pat, Ann, and Stephen, I lost Family. I loved being married. I loved being a father. I loved coming home and hearing all three say "Hi, Daddy" and filling up my life with their joy. Lord, I pray that you send another Marriage, another Family into my life.

I can still here them say that, "Hi, Daddy."

Thursday, Sept. 24

I sit here typing in Stephen's room, but he's not here. I went to the doctor today. I thought it was probably a good idea to touch base with him. He was at the funeral. He agreed that God is the only thing that carries people through times like this. He said even for the ones who don't have faith, God carries them through in one way or another. I suppose that's true, but I'd hate to try it that way. The doctor didn't have any great insights. My blood pressure, pulse, heart and lungs seemed OK. He called what I'm experiencing "Situational Depression." Amen to that.

I find people naturally refer to them as "Pat and the kids." I find myself doing that, too, so it doesn't bother me. But they'll always be "Pat, Ann, and Stephen" to me.

Sat. Sept. 26

Paul and Renae came to visit me yesterday. It sure is a blessing having them around. Today Pat's mom and dad came to have lunch with us, and we drove to Bill Knapps in Battle Creek. We drove across the spot where the accident was. The anticipation of that event is always much worse than the actual event, but I can think of nothing else as I drive across it. I know Paul and Renae feel the same. Paul and Renae have become wonderful friends as well as brother and

sister through their staying with me. Renae has the heart of a pastor. Linda (Bob's wife) called with a nice letter written to her from friends in Gladwin, a hundred or so miles north of here. The letter described how the newspaper articles had been used by people we don't even know to witness to their neighbors.

Also I got in the mail a letter from friends of Renae's mom in North Carolina, along with a pamphlet entitled "Hope-filled Grief" by Joel Nederhood, The Back to the God Hour, 6555 W. College Dr., Palos Heights IL 60463. It is the best writing I have seen on grief (e.g. "Trust in Jesus... Only then can you have hope. Only then can you mix this hope with your grief.").

Here are a few more quotes from Wolterstorff:

"What do you say to someone who is suffering...Some blurted out strange, inept things. That's OK too. Your words don't have to be wise. The heart that speaks is heard more than the words spoken. And if you can't think of anything at all to say, just say, 'I can't think of anything to say, but I want you to know that we are with you in your grief.' Or even, just embrace."

"Something is over. In the deepest levels of my existence something is finished, done. My life is divided into before and after... Perhaps what's over is happiness as the fundamental tone of my existence. Now sorrow is that. Sorrow is no longer the islands but the sea."

"The ache of the loss sinks down, and down, deep down into my soul, deep beyond all telling. How deep do souls go?" That reminds me of Ps. 35:3a, "Say to my soul, "I am your salvation."

"Through our tears we see the tears of God."

"And great mystery: to redeem our brokenness and lovelessness the God who suffers with us did not strike some mighty blow of power but sent his beloved son to suffer like us, through his suffering to redeem us from suffering and evil. Instead of explaining our suffering God shares it."

"If for each of us it was our destiny to be obliterated, and for all of us together it was our destiny to fade away without a trace, then not Christ's rising but my dear son's early dying would be the logo of our fate."

"Suddenly here he is again. The chain of suggestion can begin almost anywhere: a phrase heard in a lecture, an unpainted board on a house, a lamp-pole, a stone. From such innocuous things my imagination winds its sure way to my wound. Everything is charged with the potential of a reminder. There's no forgetting."

Sun Sept 27

Today in church Pastor Mike mentioned that our love for Jesus should be part of our everyday conversation, just as a person we loved should be. I am reminded of Ann and how she would walk up to people and ask them if they believe in Jesus. Ann probably had a more profound effect on people in her witness than most Christians have. Isn't it a shame that people who have been Christians for 10, 20, 30 or more years could have their witnesses overshadowed by that of a seven year old girl?

She wasn't just any seven year old girl, though, was she?

Tues. Sept 29

The top layer seems to be getting thinner instead of thicker. My emotions are like a roller coaster. I laugh when I'm able, and cry when I'm unable to do otherwise. In the depths, I sense God's presence, though. He comforts me and reminds me He is there. Today I had lunch with Pastor Pothoven, a dear old friend who served as an interim pastor before Pastor Mike came. He

shared with me how his mother died in an auto accident. Now, 30 years later, his eyes were still filled with tears, dealing, still dealing with grief.

Wed. Sept 30

At the quarterly church business meeting, I felt like crying half a dozen times. Like when the C.E. report was given -- Pat was supposed to be the one giving it (she was the C.E. Director). I have to think that others were thinking the same thing. Their absence was so present, as Wolterstorff said. Finally, Dave Palmer said after the Pastor's report that Mike has stolen our hearts, and I did start crying, because it's so true. I thank God for sending Mike into my life in time for this crisis.

Tomorrow, I'm talking to Dave Palmer's science class about geology. So tonight he showed me how to get to his room at the high school. As I drove past the parking lot, I could envision Stephen and Ann riding around on their bikes as they had done so often the last few months, with Pat running after them - as they had done with my video camera running the day before the accident. My heart filled with tears, even as it does now writing about it. It's strange I can't recall grief in my past. Dad died when I was 10, and I remember crying about it for two months, but not carrying it much beyond that. My sister Sylvia's baby died the same year, but I surely didn't understand that beyond the sickness that Sylvia had. Sylvia's husband, Jim died when I was an adult; he was somewhat like a father to me, and I was saddened by his death, but prepared by his long series of heart ailments. And grandma died in 1985; Ann was at that funeral, and everybody laughed because as the eulogy was finished, she started laughing out loud. That was Ann, making the absolute best out of everything in life.

With all those who died in my past, I guess I really didn't have "plans" with them for the future. Perhaps the one I've grieved the most up till now was Frank Line, a dear friend with whom I was always plotting to find a new oil field, or to start a Christian camp. My whole future, even more than my present, was Pat, Ann, and Stephen. The future is the foundation of grief, I guess. Certainly as Christ looked upon the tomb of Lazarus, one of the reasons He wept was because He saw the future of sinful man, a future of eternal condemnation, a future, as He said, consisting of wrath and gnashing of teeth. My grief is for three who are in heaven. His grief was for billions who will spend eternity in hell.

Friday, Oct 2, 1992

Today is Pat's mom & dad's 38th anniversary. When I said "congratulations on your 38th," dad choked back tears. Renae and Paul and I stayed up past midnight last night talking. They and I find it difficult to talk to dad, but there's no doubt that just our being there makes mom and dad happy. I wish there was more I could do for dad, but each of us needs to work through this in our own way.

I dreamt about Pat last night. It was so real, and so wonderful. I woke up fairly expecting her to be there.

I seem to be working through mourning each one of them separately to some extent. It seems that up until a week or so ago, I was mourning Pat, and for the last week Ann has been on my

mind. Today I noticed that I'm starting to focus on Stephen. I suppose I'll be working through them individually like that for the rest of my life.

Whenever I see a silver station wagon, I think for an instant that it's Pat, Ann, and Stephen, alive. The instant isn't long, though. I mentioned this sensation to Paul and Renae, and Paul said he experiences the same thing.

Today I'm riding up to Camp Barakel (a wonderful Christian camp in northern Michigan) for a men's retreat with Dave Palmer and Pastor Mike. The Lord always provides surprising blessings at Barakel.

Sun, Oct 4

Last night, Dave and Mike and I moved to an empty dorm to escape the snorers. We all slept great. The 7:00 A.M. bell rang, and Dave said "that's just the 2:30 'all's well' bell." None of us could believe that eight hours had passed already. When I woke up, my first thoughts were of Barakel and the activities of the day; for the first time since the accident, my first thoughts of the day were not of my missing family.

Monday, Oct 5

It was a great weekend at Barakel. It was really a special time, getting to know Dave and Mike better. Mike and I fell in the Au Sable River on a canoe trip, which I'm sure will be a fond memory of the weekend for both of us. I lost my shirt, which was loose in the boat, but fortunately Mike had closed his tackle box, and it stayed in the boat. At the instant I noticed my shirt missing, the first thought to pop in my head, was "wait till I tell Pat." I always enjoyed telling her things like that, because she had such a wonderful attitude about the stupid things I do. I'd say, "Pat, I lost my shirt when I fell in the river," and she'd instantly reply, "don't worry, I know right where the catalogue is and I'll order a new one tomorrow." There was never even a hint of blame or condemnation from her. I can't recall ever being afraid to share anything in my life with her. I sure do miss my best friend. I went to the cemetery again today. There I talk to Pat, Ann, and Stephen more freely than I do here at home. I don't know why that is, but there is something therapeutic about going there. Mike suggested that the physical presence of their bodies is comforting because our earthly bodies will someday be transformed and resurrected. That sounds like a stunning miracle, and it is.

As I look back on these past weeks, I realize another stunning miracle, the power of prayer. For weeks, I was continuously bathed in the prayers of thousands of people. It is impossible for me to describe how well that worked. So often, in my lowest times, I have instantly been uplifted, and I have recognized that someone was praying for me. It has been a remarkable experience that I will never forget.

It was about this time last year I went to Chicago for training with the post office (I was a supervisor of city carriers in Battle Creek). Something I'll never forget is one of the ways Pat showed me how she loved me. She prepared two shopping bags full of small gifts, all wrapped with ribbons. There were probably 25 different gifts, and each one had a day and time to open it. There was at least one for every day, most days had two. The other people in the class thought they were so neat, they asked me every morning what I had gotten that morning or the previous

night. I sure do miss her love.

I had lunch with a friend from church, Mike Rio, today. It is enjoyable talking with a Christian intellectual-type. It's amazing how different he and I are, with his background in social sciences and education, and my background in the sciences. Yet we are amazingly alike, almost an instantaneous brotherhood, because of our unity in faith.

I had an unexpected sudden shock today. While I was looking for something, I opened a drawer in my dresser, and there was a drawer full of things that my sister Sylvia, Renae, and another friend, Debbie Hamilton, had set aside, things that Pat, Ann, and Stephen wore every day. The first thing I saw were Stephen's slippers, and I instantly was overcome with tears. There were Pat's sweatshirt and nightgown, and Ann's penguin shirt. Thanks to Debbie, Renae, and Sylvia for preserving those things. I cry even to write of them.

Tomorrow I am going to visit my mom at a nursing home in Dayton. She has suffered from numerous strokes, so is bed-ridden with 24 hour care, but I somehow feel a compelling need to go cry on my mom's shoulder.

Wed. Oct 7

On the way to Dayton, I passed through a dense patch of fog the entire 40-mile stretch from Jackson to south of Ann Arbor. About 10 miles south of Ann Arbor, there was a multiple-car accident, probably involving over 30 cars, maybe as many as 50. I passed it about an hour ago, and since then my stomach has been twisted in a knot. I have had to stop a couple of times because my mind is not on the road, occupied instead with reliving my family's accident.

I've relived the accident many times over the past weeks. Sometimes through Pat's eyes, sometimes through Ann's, sometimes through Stephen's. Sometimes it is so real I am living it myself. Each time, it has the same horrible ending. The county medical examiner who pulled Pat, Ann, and Stephen from the car also recovered a few items from the car. Pat's wedding and engagement ring were there, as well as a ring that her dad gave her. Something else he recovered and gave me were 6 coins, "four quarters and two nickels." They are not particularly recognizable as such now. As Wolterstorff said, "If for each of us it was our destiny to be obliterated, and for all of us together it was our destiny to fade away without a trace, then not Christ's rising but my dear son's early dying would be the logo of our fate." If not for Christ's rising, those four quarters and two nickels would be the logo of our fate.

I seem to be slipping into a different stage of depression this week. More despondent, introverted.

Thurs. Oct. 8

I really did not enjoy my visit with mom. Her mind is too far gone to understand the depth of my pain.

Love is an amazing thing. If it were something devised by human minds, then each one we love would diminish our love for others. I remember talking with Dave Wilson how he felt, and I did, too, when his wife was pregnant with a second child. How could he possibly love a second as

much as he did the first? But true love has a way of multiplying rather than dividing. Love for one seems to magnify, rather than diminish, our love for another.

Friday, Oct 9
Day 50.

Sunday, Oct 11

In church, the new toddler room was dedicated to Pat. She's everywhere in my life. Every corner I turn, every drawer I open, every thing I do, Pat is there still loving me, helping me, counseling me.

The church service was remarkable. Mike is really a special servant of the Lord. It was at the same time a memorial to Pat, Ann, and Stephen and a dedication of a space in our church building to the glory of God. My prayer is that each time I see the plaque with Pat's name I would search myself for areas of my life which separate me from God.

A few weeks ago Dr. Young, our chiropractor, asked me to come upstairs with him. Dr. Young had been one of the first to learn of the accident, because Stephen missed his appointment the morning of the accident. Dr. Young's daughter sang "How Great Thou Art" at the funeral. He played a song for me, "Wish you were here" by the Kingsmen. I've probably played that song 50 times since then. So I recognized it (I said out loud, "Oh, my") as the first notes came over the P.A. system today at the service. Choir members Sterling, Sharon, and Brenda sang it, "I can just see them, walkin' on the shores of Heaven/ talkin' with God, watchin' the tides roll in ... friends who've gone on, oh, how I miss you so." Somehow between Mike, Sharon, Sterling and Brenda, they got the music and sang it. There could not have been many dry eyes as they sang it, including their own. That was a really special surprise. Mom and dad, Bob and Linda, and their children John, Joey, and Jason, plus friends Brad and Amanda, and Pastor Mike came over after church for dinner. Bob and Linda were the last to leave. I spent an hour crying after they left, trying to prepare for communion tonight.

Mon. Oct 12

Today was probably the best day I've had from start to finish since August 21. Numerous friends uplifted me, right up until 11:00 PM with Bob Murphy.

Tues. Oct 13

My dear friend Charlie went with me to pick up a check for a life insurance policy we had on Pat. I would surely trade that check and a lot more for just one more day with Pat or Ann or Stephen. As I discussed with Bob Murphy last night, if each moment in my marriage with Pat were a page in a book, there would not be a single page in the book I would want removed. It would be a perfect book, each page a joy to read. To remove any page would make it incomplete.

Wed Oct 14

Brad stayed over last night. Today I had lunch with Pastor Pothoven and Madge. Tonight Brad will be staying with me again. One of the ways the Lord has taken especially good care of me is that he has protected me from loneliness. Certainly, I often feel sorrow, even pain, at my loss. But I can't recall feeling lonely. He has provided me with a good mix of visits with people, good books to read, and miracles, the combination of which have protected me from loneliness. And in my lowest hours, all I need to do (and have done countless times) is ask Him to take the pain away. When I do that, it seems He wraps His arms around me and comforts me, just like the loving Father that He truly is.

As I look back over the previous weeks, I think of the various possibilities if one or two had survived the accident. I think of mourning Pat's loss with two children, a living Ann and Stephen. Or the loss of Ann, and the grief that it would bring to Pat, along with explaining the loss to Stephen. Or the loss of Stephen, a tragic loss which would be felt so deeply by Pat, who nurtured him so carefully (he had severe allergies), tempered by the strength that I know Ann would have. I think of sharing the loss of both Pat and Stephen with a living Ann, or sharing the loss of both Pat and Ann with my joyous boy Stephen. And I think of the desperate grief that Pat and I would be suffering together if both Ann and Stephen had died. As terribly tragic as each of those scenarios sounds, each one to me sounds wonderful in the face of reality.

Thurs. Oct 15

Brad stayed with me again last night, while Amanda was out of town. He asked me if I ever have doubts about God. I think every Christian has thoughts of doubt. But where do those thoughts come from? They certainly don't come from within myself, because I know what God has done for me, and all I need to do is recall the myriad of miracles He has performed in my life to prove again His presence in my life. The thoughts certainly aren't coming from God. The only place remaining for their origin is Satan. So I responded to Brad that when I have thoughts of doubt, I simply rebuke Satan, a power given and freely available to every Christian ("Satan, in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to go away and leave me alone"). Perhaps that sounds simplistic to non-Christians, but the fact is, it works every time, in every instance (such as occurs daily).

Pat wanted to help Angel Thompson, a worker with Child Evangelism Fellowship who led five day clubs at our house last summer. So last week I wrote CEF to find out what Angel's needs are for the rest of the year. Today I was going to the bank to deposit the "lump sum death benefit" check from Social Security, \$255.00; I decided to put it in the checking account figuring God would show me how to use it. On the way to the bank I picked up my mail. There was the reply from CEF, indicating Angel's needs. Her needs were \$258.26. There's a gift truly from Pat and God.

Today I prepared for a ten-day trip out west with Bob Cheyne. I pray that he would see Christ through me on this trip.

Friday Oct 16

I suppose rational people really don't give a hoot about what rock their grave marker is made of. Even to Doug Mills, the funeral director, one granite was much like another. However, it is widely recognized that geologists are neither rational nor are they one like another. I had always

told Pat (assuming I would die first) that I wanted a Minnesota Gneiss marker on my grave. Not only is it my opinion that it is the most beautiful rock in cemeteries (and buildings) everywhere, it is a rock with geological significance, in that it is the oldest dated rock in continental North America, and one of the oldest anywhere (dated at 4 billion years). Doug was not 100% sure of the name, because marker companies don't use geological names; he thought it was called "rainbow" in grave marker lingo. So he kindly arranged for me to look at the rock before it got carved. The fellow who brought it to Marshall from Grand Rapids was very knowledgeable about both industry and geological terminology, and was notably surprised when I told him what quarry the rock came from. I think of Pat's accepting smile, as she not only put up with the eccentricities of a geologist husband, but even encouraged them with love.

Today we reached Moab, Utah about 7:30 Utah time, 9:30 Michigan time. Getting into my motel room, I found myself wanting to go directly to the phone to let Pat know I had arrived safely. I've always done that the moment I get into my room. It's such an ingrained habit, that when I realized I couldn't call her, I felt like I should call somebody, so I called Dave Palmer, who, along with Pastor Mike, came to my office to tell me of the accident..

Saturday, Oct 17

Happy fifth birthday, Stephen. I love you.

I don't think I've ever known anyone so full of joy as Stephen. Whenever he would find something, like a bird's nest, or even a piece of ribbon in the yard, he got so excited about it, he would come running into the house so excited. "Daddy," he'd shout, "look what I've found." He was so excited that I could only respond with excitement and joy. He did that all day long, every day. He also got excited when he had an accomplishment, even of the smallest nature. Even when he was pouting about something as kids do, it was a false pouting. I would just make a little pouty smile, and he would respond in open laughter, recognizing that he and I both knew that he was faking it. He had far more joy in his 4 1/2 years than most people have in a lifetime. He had an unquenchable spirit and unbounded joy. And he brought me unlimited happiness which I carry with me today, 57 days after the accident. Dear Stephen, you may not be here physically, but I have not lost you. I thank you, and I thank my living God and Savior for those precious years.

His first name came from Stephen in the Bible. Stephen is described in the book of Acts as being full of faith and full of the Spirit. He was perhaps largely a part of the apostle Paul's testimony. Only one other man, Barnabas, was described as being both full of faith and the Spirit. We couldn't very well name him Barnabas. I always prayed that Stephen would grow up that way, full of faith and full of the Spirit. Most non-Christians are unaware that at the moment a person accepts Christ, the Spirit enters to indwell that person from that point on. Often Christians have a tendency to ignore the leading of the Spirit, but the Spirit is always there.

Stephen almost died when he was born. His 5-minute APGAR score was 2. I wrote Stephen a letter, in case I died before he was old enough to understand what I wanted to say. I'll quote it in its entirety: "October, 1987. Dear Stephen, Someday I hope you'll learn what it's like watching your own child be born. Your entry into this world was just about as hard as can be. Even as I write this, I begin to forget the anguish and fear that I had in the moments after you were born.

You were very near death. As the doctors tried to save you, your mother and I were in panic. In that moment - after what seemed like an eternity after you were born - I left your mother's side and sat down beside her bed. I had prayed for nine months that you would be healthy. I've had many other prayers answered in the past. In fact, I've never had a sincere prayer go unanswered. With strong faith that Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God, and died on the cross for our sins, and was raised three days later, God will always answer your prayers. But never had I prayed such an urgent intercessory prayer. My prayer was short, and, in effect was 'Lord, breathe life into that baby's body NOW.' It was not two seconds later that you were wailing away, kicking and screaming. Stephen, you would not be here now if God had not answered my prayer. My prayer now is that your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior will be, throughout your life, the most important thing you have. Your namesake in the Bible was 'full of faith.' Please study that man's life and the effect he had on this world. With Love, Dad."

Though his life was short, that prayer was answered, too. Bob Cheyne and I spent the day hiking around Arches National Park. It was a stunningly beautiful day in a singularly exotic environment. I often thought of Ann during the day. She was such a great traveler. I would have loved to have brought her here. She was so intelligent and so curious, she would have asked hundreds of questions. I suppose all kids do that, but what made it special with Ann was that she would never tire of my going into detail about what we were looking at. On the contrary, she would probe deeper for more information. In this exotic place, I could have gone into great detail on the geology, the plant life, the animals we saw, and the principles of photography, and she would have absorbed it all. I was always surprised when she would recall scientific details from a discussion we had had months or years before. Today, we would have talked until we were hoarse. Finally, at the end of the day as I was putting her to bed, we together would have recognized God's hand in making this place, and thanked Him for our day together. In a sense, we did spend the day together, and I do thank Him for that.

It's amazing to me what close friends Ann and I were. I told her that almost every night. I could really talk to her about my job, my concerns, my joys. She wasn't always able to understand everything I shared, but she was always able to listen and share her concerns. And she certainly shared her life with me, as well.

Tuesday, Oct. 20

Having been gone from home since Thursday night, I tonight became aware of a new feeling. For no apparent reason, I started crying when I got into my motel room tonight. Then I realized what it was. I miss having someone to miss at home.

Today, Bob and I went to the Grand Canyon so I could show him something I've been talking about with him for years. It had to do with Michigan geology, specifically the Trenton Formation. The Trenton was so important to me, and to Pat, that we named our son after the rock formation -- Stephen Trenton DeHaas. Ann understood his name, but Stephen was too young to really understand it. So he never knew the story behind his middle name.

Stephen was old enough to understand something else, though. Several months ago, in a K-Mart parking lot, I asked him, "Do you know how to make sure you're going to heaven?" He said he did, but I wasn't so sure, so I questioned him on it. I asked him, "Do you get to heaven by being good?" "No," he replied. "By going to church?" I asked. Again he replied, "No." "Then how do you get to heaven?" I asked. He knew the answer, that we get to heaven by faith

in Christ. I explained that he needed to pray to God, and he said he was ready to do that. He then repeated the prayer after me, "Dear Lord, I know that I sometimes do bad things. I know that I deserve to be punished for those bad things, but that Jesus paid that punishment by dying on the cross for me. I'm asking you now, in the best way I know how, to be my Savior." In that simple moment in the K-Mart parking lot, my son sealed his own salvation.

Whoever reads these words should recognize that a 4 1/2 year old could understand the most profound message in the universe, that eternal life is available to all who sincerely pray that prayer.

Ann and Stephen were such a pleasure that no matter what the situation, no matter whether they were busy or upset, I could always get them to smile. I really enjoyed that in them.

Sat. Oct. 24

Throughout this trip, I have seen numerous things that I would have liked to buy for Ann and Stephen. They are still such a part of my life, a part of me.

Monday, Oct. 26

Home again. After ten days' absence, I find, perhaps more than any other time since the accident, that I hear the silence in my house.

Tuesday, Nov. 3

I always was uplifted when Pat praised me in front of other people. She and I had an unwritten and unspoken "rule" that we never said anything bad about the other in front of other people. We never chastised each other, or even told jokes about each other in front of others. If we had anything to say, it was words of praise. I always cringe when I hear other married couples do that. That was one of the small things that made our marriage so perfect. Even in private, if one of us wanted to call the other's attention to a bad attitude, or some action which was questionable, it was always done in love, always giving the benefit of doubt to the other. I can't recall a time either one of us took offense when things like that were called to our attention. In fact, we almost always already knew we had acted wrongly, and because of the way it was brought up in love, we were willing to admit it and change.

Friday, Nov. 6, 1992

Ten years ago today, Pat and I were married. All who were there must recall what a joyous occasion that was. We were married by Pastor Jim Savage, who died earlier this year. The entire ceremony, from start to finish, was a celebration of what we were sure was to be a perfect marriage. And the last ten years have been the most perfect of my life, a constant joy. It's true that we had stresses from job changes, from Stephen's allergies, from my mom's strokes. But my family was my retreat, my fortress, my joy, my life.

What was it that made my family so complete, so perfect in a world where families fall apart like brittle ashes? The answer is that Christ was at the center of our family, at the center of our lives. A marriage cannot be perfect without Christ at the center. He was there right from the beginning with me and Pat. Through Him, Pat taught me what Biblical love is, and from the beginning, Pat

and I had that love for each other, as in 1 Corinthians 13 ("Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails."). As pastor Mike said at the funeral, it was "the human family as God intended it to be." I thank God for the best ten years a person could have.

Some friends have expressed concern for me today, saying that an anniversary like this is always tough. But Pat and I never made a big deal about holidays or anniversaries. What made even Christmas special was not the holiday itself, but the looking forward to family getting together to remember Christ's birth; we always got together as a family on a day other than Christmas anyway, so the day itself was not so important. In fact, for years in my business, if a geologist was needed on Christmas day (as was almost always the case), I always volunteered so that others could have the day with their family. Pat and I celebrated Christ's birth daily. And so we celebrated our marriage, daily, even hourly, moment by moment. Anyway, I've always wondered what was so magical about numbers that end in zero. Why not, instead of 10th, 20th, 50th, etc. being important, consider all prime numbered years as important (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, etc.)? Or why not choose important days instead of years (today Pat and I have been married 3652 days -- shouldn't we wait until next October to celebrate the 4000th day)? At any rate, I hope friends understand that today is really no more special than any other day in celebration of the days, the moments, that I had with my family.

Would I like to get married again? I loved being married. I know that if I find a godly woman and Christ at the center of another marriage, I could enjoy yet another perfect marriage. Perhaps some would feel guilty, thinking it inappropriate to marry again. I consider it a tribute to the wonderful memories of Pat, Ann, and Stephen that I want to get married again.

People have told me there was something different about my family, even something different about me. The difference they see is Christ living in us. God could have come up with any plan for disseminating His word to people. For example, He could have decided to appear in a golden chariot of fire in the sky, shaken the earth, made the sky turn purple, write his message in big orange letters in the sky, then had the letters of the message turn to cotton candy to fall from the sky for everyone to enjoy. But instead, He chose to live inside (indwell) believers, and has them tell others the message in a way that others can see Christ living in them.

I hope readers can see that my faith is true from my standpoint. What is impossible to express, however, is that faith in Christ is true from every standpoint. By our human nature, we tend to relate our faith to one another from the standpoint at which we are currently located. My current location in the wake of a tragedy happens to be a good one for sharing my faith. But I would like to express that my faith is true from every standpoint. It was true in our day-to-day family life. It was true as my family saw a multitude of answered prayers. It was true in my job changes, in my relationships, in my waking, in my sleeping. G. K. Chesterton, in his book, Orthodoxy said, "it is very hard for a man to defend anything of which he is entirely convinced... A man is not really convinced of a philosophic theory when he finds that something proves it. He is only really convinced when he finds that EVERYTHING proves it. And the more converging reasons he finds pointing to this conviction, the more bewildered he is if asked suddenly to sum them up. Thus, if one asked an ordinary intelligent man, on the spur of the moment, 'Why do you prefer

civilization to savagery?' he would look wildly round at object after object, and would only be able to answer vaguely, 'Why, there is that bookcase, and the coals in the coal-scuttle, and pianos, and policemen.' The whole case for civilization is that the case for it is complex. It has done so many things. But that very multiplicity of proof which ought to make reply overwhelming makes reply impossible."

Another way of looking at it is to imagine you and me being alone together in the middle of a vast desert, but with a swimming pool right next to us. However, for some reason you decide there is no swimming pool. Trying to convince you of what I know to be true, I say, "look, right here." I jump in and climb back out, dripping wet. I say, "look, I jumped in and I'm all wet. Can't you believe now?" Christ is so obviously real to me that I am covered from head to toe, from the depth of my soul to the peak of my scientifically-oriented probing intelligence with my faith in Christ. WHY CAN'T EVERYBODY SEE THAT??

My own answer to that last question is that I was 30 years old, had 12 years of public school, and eleven years of college, and had NEVER ONCE heard the simple message of the Bible. Perhaps you've never heard it, either.

Do you know for sure if you have eternal life? It's simple enough, you can do it right now. You must take four steps:

1. Recognize that you (like me and everybody else) are a sinner.
2. Recognize that if the universe is a perfectly just universe, and if God is a perfectly just god, that you deserve to pay a penalty for those sins. The penalty as prescribed in Romans 6:23 is eternal condemnation ("The wages of sin is death").
3. Recognize that Christ paid the penalty for YOUR sins by dying on the cross. Imagine going to pay your taxes and finding out that someone has already paid them for you. That's what the cross was all about. Then He showed his power by coming back to life three days later.
4. Tell those three things to God in prayer. You can do that right now. Seal your own salvation by sincerely praying, "Dear God, I know that I am a sinner, and that I deserve to pay a penalty for those sins. I recognize that Christ died to pay for those sins, and was raised three days later. I'm asking you now, in the best way I know, to come into my life and be my Savior."

If you prayed that sincerely, and then pray often, read the Bible often, and seek out a Christian to fellowship with, you will be amazed at the transformation in your life, just as I have been amazed at the transformation in my life. No other religion has God coming in person to save the world. Many have prophets, like Muhammad or Buddha, but they did not claim to be God. Only Christ made that claim. He was either God or he was a fool. Other religions of the world require you to DO something to have eternal life, and then they don't give you a way of KNOWING you have eternal life. Only Christ said: For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18, Words of Christ)

Now that you've been confronted with it, please don't reject it. Your eternal life depends on it!

More than a year later, I wrote this letter:

January 5, 1994

Dear Friends,

One of the advantages of being chronically negligent at letter writing is that, having established that reputation, no one expects a letter from me. Well, the time has come to update you on my life and to let you know how much I have appreciated your thoughts and prayers over the last year and a half.

I trust your holiday season was enjoyable and otherwise uneventful. Mine was both enjoyable and eventful, as I'll share with you in the following.

Isaiah 61:1-3 summarizes events of my life since I last wrote in my journal: The Lord sent Isaiah "to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to grant those who mourn in Zion, giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting, so they will be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified."

"Giving them a garland instead of ashes..."

But I need to start with someone else's story. Many of my friends know Jean Wideman. Nearly two and a half years ago, her husband, who was my pastor, left our church in Marshall (which he had pastored for over four years), left Jean and her three young children, left his friends, left his mother and father and brothers and sister, for a young girl in the community. In the wake of his decision was a grieving, disillusioned church (I was on the Deacon/Elder Board at the time); a devastated wife with no home, no job, no apparent means of continuing to raise her family; and friends, parents, and other family members who could not believe he could turn his back on them, forsaking his job, his education, his very integrity for such a seemingly trivial relationship. Somehow, he was able to forsake his responsibility to his wife and three children, with not so much as a phone call for over a year. He has married this girl now. His husbandless wife and fatherless children had nowhere to turn but to God for help, and they did just that. They persevered, even thrived. For the most part, his friends and family, shaken in their trust of this man, were not shaken in their faith, and they too have continued strong in their walks with God. The desolation, shame, and uncertainty of the future left behind ashes and mourning, but Jean depended on her God, who in turn provided instead of ashes a garland, the oil of gladness.

You know my story, one of profound grief and mourning. "How could you survive?" many have asked me. I assure you that it was nothing in me, but my God who has turned the ashes into a garland, mourning into the oil of gladness.

Now, as the saying goes, "the rest of the story..."

Jean Wideman (known to all as Jeanne, pronounced "Genie") is now Jean DeHaas. We met for

dinner on August 12, 1993, surprising each other how well we got along, and how much we had in common. In the years that we knew each other in Marshall, I was friends with her husband (my pastor), and she was friends with Pat (they were both stay-at-home moms who home-schooled the kids). But she and I can't recall any more than a cordial conversation together. We had a truly blessed whirlwind romance and were married on October 6.

In my journal I prayed September 23 for another perfect family, and the Lord has abundantly answered that prayer. Many of my friends also joined in that prayer. In fact, as many have shared, perhaps a dozen friends were specifically praying that Jeanne and I would get together.

Now I am husband and father to another perfect family. We have three children, Hannah (11), Andrew (9), and Thomas (6). And they are really wonderful. Hannah is maturing to a young lady before our very eyes, and she is loving and compassionate. Andrew has a wonderful sense of awareness of nature and beauty, and has a gift for discernment. Thomas is extremely bright, and is likely to accomplish whatever he sets his mind to.

And another one is on the way already!! A new baby is due about the first of August. Jeanne is greatly struggling with so-called "morning" (in her case, all-day) sickness, so I am busy taking care of her needs and taking care of the kids as best I can, besides the other activities of life.

Isn't it great? Some may murmur and moan about the daily humdrum activities of life. True, they take a lot of energy, but I count every one of them a blessing. In fact, it wasn't until I lost what I had that I realized what a gift life really is. I get to do those humdrum activities again!!

One of the wonderful aspects of my relationship with Jeanne is that she really understands my grief, and shares in it. I have not replaced the family I have lost, but rather have added to it. By the same token, she has not replaced what she has lost, but has simply had her life and family revived and regenerated through the grace of God.

We had a spectacular honeymoon in Europe. We spent 6 nights in Paris, then traveled for 5 days through Germany up the Rhein River (Castle country), and ended up in Amsterdam (my dad's boyhood home), where we spent 2 nights.

I've done a lot of traveling in the last year, with another trip to Amsterdam and northwest Africa (Tunisia), a couple of trips out west, a trip to see the Mississippi flood, Minnesota, Florida, New York, etc. One of my new hobbies is photography, as a result of my first trip out west (which I talk about in my journal). Now, with Jeanne sick, I plan to stay put for a while.

Well, you have my apologies for letting so much time slip by before filling you in on all the happenings of the past months, but with so many events filling my life, alongside the grief that I still have, even my reputation for negligence in letter writing is stretched.

And then several months later:

August 9, 1994

SHE'S HERE !!!

Abigail Anne DeHaas was born Tuesday, August 2 at 12:09 P.M.

She was 7 lb. 11 oz. and 21" long. Thanks to much prayer, everything went great - even the labor was fairly easy for Jeanne. When Abbie was born, she started crying even before she was all the way out, and has been very alert ever since. Right away, she looked like she was two weeks old, she looked so healthy. Jeanne is doing great also; a little tired as might be expected, but she's in great health and recovering quickly.

Hannah, Andrew, and Thomas are so excited to have a new sister, they fight over who gets to hold her. Jeanne and I have to stand in line sometimes to see her!

Pastor Mike Donahue of Calvary Baptist Church in Marshall said at my family's funeral, "life is a gift, a precious gift." Surely all who know us must recognize the precious gift that Abigail is to our family. Isaiah 61 says "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted, He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted... giving them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a spirit of fainting."

Psalm 130:11 says "Thou has turned for me my mourning into dancing; thou has loosed my sackcloth and girded me with gladness; that my soul may sing praise to Thee, and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to Thee forever."

If you know Jeanne and all she's been through, you would surely rejoice with her over this new gift. If you know me and all I've been through, you would surely rejoice with me over this new gift. But for both of us to share this gift together must speak to you of how awesome our God is; that He is a loving, redeeming God.

As the verse above states, Jeanne and I are girded with gladness, that our souls may sing praise to God, and not be silent. O Lord my God, we will together give thanks to Thee forever.

Thank you for rejoicing with us in God's redemption!

Sincerely in Christ,

Ron and Jeanne DeHaas
Hannah, Andrew, Thomas, & Abigail