

## GRIEF, LOSS, AND HOPE

He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.

Psalm 18:16

### INSIDE

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In Weakness  
There is Strength

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Hope 9-1-1



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The cornerstone of our program is Christ-centered leadership coaching and counseling intensives held at our retreat center in Parker, Colorado. Our one and two week customized coaching programs focus on preventative solutions to the debilitating stresses that pastors, missionaries and other Christian leaders face. We also provide hope, direction, renewal, and restoration through counseling intensives when these pressures bring leaders to us who have become overwhelmed. Our talented group of licensed therapists are equipped to deal with PTSD, empathy and compassion fatigue, depression, marital and family issues, grief, addictive behavior and any other crisis a leader may be facing.



from the President *Scott R. Thompson*

The idea for this edition of the *Compass Magazine* came to me after I was introduced to Victoria Johnson at a QuietWaters Counselor meeting in January of this year. I heard just a little bit of Vicki's story and my immediate thought was, "I wish you could meet someone. Someone who has shared a few steps on the same journey." That someone was Tricia Lott Williford. My thoughts were flooded with ideas and questions. What if these two would write articles? That would be a powerful issue. More thoughts, more questions. Would they do it? Could they do it? You see, Tricia's story is very public. She speaks, she writes, she travels, she has two boys, she is so busy. Would she be willing or have time to write an article? Would Vicki be willing to share her story in writing? Would it be too painful for her? She speaks, she counsels, she is so busy. All these questions and many more were answered. A sweet answer to my prayers. We are privileged to have both of them share in this edition. Please allow me to introduce them to you.

In 2012, Tricia Lott Williford's self-written introduction in her blog read like this:

I am a writer, a teacher, a reader, and a thinker. I am Tucker and Tyler's mom, and I am Robb's wife, although I am learning a widowed life without him. I love a great novel, and **someday I want to publish one of my own.** I collect words, quotes, books, and bracelets. I take my caffeine hot or cold: I believe diet Pepsi is best with a lime, and coffee is largely about the feel of the mug in my hand. Oh, and sometimes I snort when I laugh, talk in my sleep, and cry without warning.

Most of what she wrote is still true today. However, "someday" happened in February of this year. Tricia published her first book, which is titled *And Life Comes Back*, A Wife's Story of Love, Loss and Hope Reclaimed. Donald Miller, *New York Times* best-selling author of *Blue Like Jazz* says, "Tricia Lott Williford's book reminds us it often takes a thick darkness to make known the light. *And Life Comes Back* is a candle that will light your path."

We are blessed and honored to have Tricia share a small piece of her story in this issue. Her article is titled *Hope 9-1-1*.

Victoria Johnson received her Masters in Social Work from the University of Connecticut in 1990 and has worked in a variety of clinical settings including community mental health, psychiatric hospitals, and private practice. She is currently with Grace Counseling in Littleton, Colorado. She is one of the talented professionals that works with us at QuietWaters Ministries. Recently, I had the privilege of speaking with a couple who were clients of Victoria's. They said, "We love Vicki! She was the catalyst for restoring our marriage and our ministry. She is a very talented professional."

Clinically, Victoria is passionate about helping people who are struggling with emotional and relational issues. She is especially interested in couples, women's issues and leadership dynamics as they relate to anxiety, depression, and addictions. Victoria specializes in trauma, abuse, grief work, and family of origin dysfunction related to adult functioning, emotions and marriage. In her own words, she "sinks her hands into the messiness of other people's pain."

Vicki, widowed in 2011, has three wonderful daughters and sons-in-law

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and six tender, young, wild, and crazy, grandchildren. They are the love of her life.

In this edition of the *Compass Magazine*, Vicki shares her personal story of grief, loss, and the redemptive journey in her article titled *In Weakness There is Strength*.

By the way, I got my wish. Tricia and Vicki met at the end of April. I watched them as they shared a moment, a laugh, an embrace, and a salty tear.

Two stories, two widows, and a shared love for Jesus. Their stories may bring a salty wetness to your senses as well. Their faith will encourage you. Grab a tissue before you turn the page... ■

  
**QuietWaters®**  
MINISTRIES



# In Weakness There is STRENGTH

by Vicki Johnson MSW, LCSW  
QuietWaters Counselor

When my three daughters were very young, they learned the answer to any question they asked me before my morning wake-up coffee was, “No.” Now moms of toddlers, my daughters strive for that same passage of sleep-to-wake.

There is nothing sweeter than my slow wake-up ritual with that first cup of fresh coffee.

But on Sunday, July 24, 2011 the phone startled me from this quiet routine.

“Is this Vicki Johnson?”

Why hadn’t I followed my own rule and said, “No”? Perhaps I could have stopped the rest of the impending crisis.

During my coffee quiet time that Sunday morning, I was lost in thought about the events of the day and I was reminiscing about those of the previous month.

My husband, Doug, was on a spiritual adventure to study and experience John Eldredge’s book *Wild at Heart*. Six men met in Montana, 26 miles from the beautiful, remote town of Ennis, to fish in the wild, disclose the arrows that pierced their hearts, and to deepen their relationship with the “beauty they won.” Without a doubt, fireside chats included larger than life “fish stories.” I was delighted for him to experience this needed time away

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These would be his last words to  
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from the demands and pressures of life as a leader of several ministries.

My middle daughter, Abbi, and her family had been visiting Colorado the previous month. That month prior to Doug’s adventure was filled with love, chaos, crazy schedules and most importantly, family time. We continued with our family ritual of renting a condo in Keystone for a fun-filled July 4th weekend. These traditional weekends were fun and awful at the same time. We would laugh, eat, and have poignant conversations amongst the constant crying of at least one—if not all five—grandchildren. On that trip we had fun navigating the various nap times, calming upset babies, keeping five babies/toddlers active—and all this managed with sleepless nights. The Norman Rockwell American family reunion!

Two weeks later, on Monday, I dropped Abbi and her family at the airport. I was so sad to send them 2,000 miles away again. The next day I dropped Doug off at the same airport. And then my youngest daughter, Libbi, and her family moved in. The week Doug was gone was filled, balancing work and spending as much time as possible with my daughters and five grandchildren.

Whenever Doug was out of town he faithfully called me every day. On this trip, deep in the wild country, there were no cellular towers. Six days with no communication. Then a miracle, although I didn’t know it at the time. I received a text. “I love you, D.” I replied “Have fun, be crazy, I love you.” I don’t know how he found the cellular window, nor if he received my text, but I know he thought of me and loved me. These would be his last words to me. And hopefully, mine to him.

I was excited to soon have Doug home, scheduled for return at 5:00 pm. I was anticipating our usual dance: I would try to pry all the confidential information from him, but Doug was an incredible listener and confidant. I knew my prying would yield no results; however, it was always flirtatious to try.

Sunday, around 9 a.m., the ringing phone startled me from my morning coffee quiet time.

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"Is this Vicki Johnson?"

"Yes?" (*What telemarketer is calling on a Sunday morning?*)

"This is Jan Janura. I am the leader of the retreat Doug has been on."

(*Blank confusion on my part*)

"Doug has been up all night with a really bad headache and vomiting."

(*Oh dear, he has another migraine*)

"He is in an ambulance on his way to Enis Hospital."

I replied, "I'm sure he just has a really bad migraine."

"Vicki, he was in a lot of pain, vomiting and crying out, 'Oh Lord, Oh Lord.'"

(*Weird, he usually just moans*) "Okay?"

Jan said, "I'll call you when I get there, I am driving behind the ambulance."

(*Is this for real?*)

Fifteen minutes later the emergency room doctor called. Doug was in a lot of pain and they were ruling out diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and a slew of other things I can't remember. They were keeping him comfortable with morphine. I told the doctor I was sure it was a really bad migraine and there was nothing to rule out. He said he would call me back when they knew something.

I was confused but was confident he was having an unusually bad migraine.

The doctor called back too quickly. "You need to get to Billings immediately, we are taking him by helicopter there now!"

I said, "Okay, bye." I never asked why, what was wrong, what hospital in Billings. I just said, "Okay, bye."

**A terrifying tsunami wave destroyed everything in my path—future and past. This was the end of the only life I knew. From that point forward my name changed from wife to widow, my children were now fatherless and our grandchildren would never know their loving Papa.**

Frantically I yelled for Libbi. "I have to go to Billings now, find me a flight." Then, "No, I need you to pack for me." Then, "No, get me a ticket." It was a miracle she found a flight that would get me to Billings within four hours. Kelli, my oldest daughter, called and had a hotel reservation near the hospital for me and said my nephew and his wife, who live in Montana, would be there to meet Doug's helicopter.

All plans fell apart. The plane was delayed in Colorado Springs, just one hour away. I couldn't stop sobbing, so frustrated that my plane was so close, yet so far away and I had no control. Strangers were generous, gracious, offered food, water, and encouragement that things would be okay. The plane finally arrived two hours later and as I was handing the airline hostess my ticket, Kelli called sobbing, telling me that Dad suffered a massive seizure. I collapsed.

Once I was at Billings Hospital the neurological surgeon said Doug's brain was filled with blood. They needed my permission to operate immediately.

My niece and nephew were with me every moment, nurturing and graciously leading me through decisions while I was in shock, numb and so confused. (*I have to be in a nightmare. Wake up, wake up. If I just wake up the nightmare will end.*)

The surgeon drilled a hole in my Doug's head to relieve the pressure in his brain. He did not know the cause of the bleeding but Doug needed to be transferred immediately to one of only four neurological critical care trauma hospitals in the country. Miraculously, one of the hospitals was Swedish Hospital in Denver, Colorado. Within 45 minutes I was on a medical jet with two critical care nurses and my husband strapped to a stretcher in a chaotic mess of tubes attached to several machines.

Within two hours we were in Denver. The attempts to move Doug, strapped to the stretcher, off the plane were like putting a square peg in a round hole. He was becoming agitated in his unconscious state and nurses kept telling him, "It's okay, it's okay." I went aside and threw up. Then I yelled at them, "Tell him Vicki is here, tell him Vicki is here." He moved both feet out to the side and back just once. He knew I was there. He would be alright.

Five doctors, Kelli, and Libbi met us at the hospital as the paramedics wheeled Doug into surgery. Two hours later they confirmed our worst fears. He had three brain aneurysms. Two had burst and the third was about to. Surgery to block this aneurysm caused a major stroke.



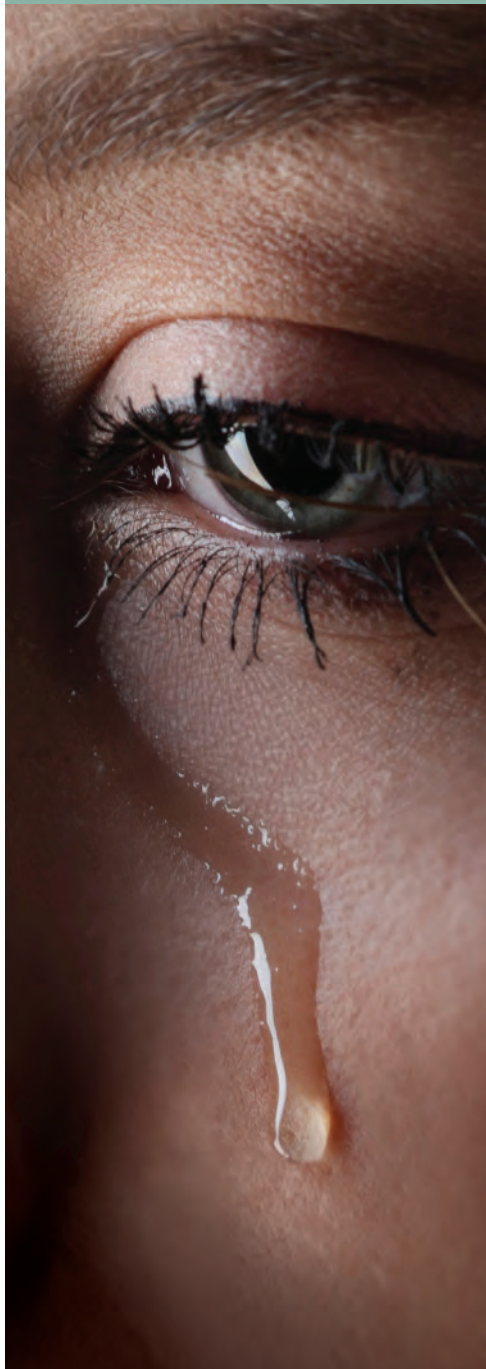
Abbi flew back immediately, six days after she left us. The next ten days were arduous and a blur. We camped out in the waiting room from early morning until late at night. Doug had five more surgeries and numerous procedures and crises during those 10 days. Hundreds of people loved Doug and visited us in the waiting room, providing us with prayer, support, and food. We prayed, cried, slept, and were so scared.

At times there was comic relief. Not knowing all Doug's friends, I introduced myself to a woman who was sitting with my family when I returned from a quiet visit with Doug. She said she didn't know us but we looked like we were more fun to wait with. Those were a wretched 10 days.

On August 3, 2011, Douglas C. Johnson died with his family by his side. That sounds so sweet. In reality we were deep in shock, wretchedly sobbing and begging to know if ending treatment was really the right decision. Doug worried and prayed for me because I have fibromyalgia. He was a great care-giver. Loving, protective, tender and concerned husband. The Holy Spirit laid on my heart the old hymn "It Is Well with My Soul." I sang this softly in his ear so he would know I would be okay. My lips, close to his, I inhaled his last breaths. I ushered him into death telling him to look for Jesus, look for Jesus.

Tragically and fortunately the July 4th trip to Keystone would be the last time we would be together as a family, and the last day some would see their Dad and Papa.

**I couldn't sleep, eat, or function.  
I was at the bottom of the deep,  
dark and murky ocean, being  
thrashed by horrendous currents,  
rip-tides and the destruction only  
the ocean endures.**



A terrifying tsunami wave destroyed everything in my path—future and past. This was the end of the only life I knew. From that point forward my name changed from wife to widow, my children were now fatherless and our grandchildren would never know their loving Papa.

My life became surreal and massively traumatic. We never planned for death. I knew nothing.

We could not find his passwords, anywhere, and we searched endlessly. The bank would not disclose the information I needed to pay bills without passwords. Nothing can be done without a death certificate. The death certificate had the hospital's address as my home address. I needed to go to court to release our wills from 1981. I learned I had four legal names: thus another court procedure to declare one legal name. (*Who cares?*) To make matters worse and eventually traumatic, Doug's health insurance company turned down every claim to every provider for almost two years even though the policy covered everything, in full. I had to read and re-read every procedure he went through from these bills, over and over. "Respiratory failure" again and again. It was killing me. Collection agencies were calling. I had no idea what investments he had or with whom. My private practice was falling apart. I couldn't sleep, eat, or function. I was at the bottom of the deep, dark and murky ocean, being thrashed by horrendous currents, rip-tides and the destruction only the ocean endures.

*(Continued on page 8)*

People showered me with love, empathy, compassion, and love the first four months after Doug died. He was the executive director of The Charitable Fund, a Christian Donor-Advised Fund. Our active social life was comprised of the people Doug knew and his events. He was charismatic and everyone loved him. We had “couple” friends. I no longer belonged in a couple’s world.

My first time at church, a knife pierced my heart and soul. I was lost. I didn’t “belong.” Our usual pew was filled with strangers. I was dying without Doug’s hand on mine. Discussions in the lobby after service were surreal. When asked the question “How are you doing?” was I to answer honestly, which would take time and tears. Or should I answer politely “I’m making it.” A lie. I did not have close girlfriends. I lost our married friends as they were grieving also. Our church home group dispersed. Time slipped by and no one knew I was struggling so hard. I was alone. Church is still too painful.

Amongst these trips to hell, God showed Himself to me. I knew through experience it was senseless to ask the whys, glibly quote a scripture or say “He is in control.” My questions were: *Can I stay close to You, God, in all the unknowing, and can I trust You, grow in my faith, know You in a new intimate way?* God revealed He was with me in miraculous ways which I began to call “God Kisses.”

I fell in love with Jesus with more trust, faith, and intimacy. Totally in love.

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Immediately after Doug’s death I was invited into a Bible study with the wives of the men from the “Tuesday Morning” Bible study Doug led. It was God’s miracle that it met during my lunch break. Definitely a yes, even though I knew no one. “A God Kiss.”

Many months later they learned I was not functioning at home. They all gathered at my home to clean, sort, and throw things away at their discretion. Without my supervision. I prayed that God would release me of control and submit to their love. They made my home a beautiful retreat to grieve in. I have not missed nor looked for a thing. “A God Kiss.”

An attorney whom Doug helped years ago to set up his private practice offered help with settling the estate. He loved Doug and then me through that love for Doug. “A God Kiss.”

A new friend of Doug’s, a wealth manager, became Jesus in the skin to me. He took me under his wing and spent hours and hours coaching me how to put one foot in front of the other, to function in the midst of tragedy. One rule: No decisions without his approval. That was his (or His) rule! “A God Kiss.”

Our home, becoming overwhelming, sold at a party, to Abbi and BJ’s best friends. My house of mourning transformed to joy, laughter, fun and the pitter patter of five little children. They even named their youngest baby “Abbilynn” after my Abbilynn. A miracle. “A God Kiss.”

My children packed our home of 20 years. All alone, I closed the garage door for the last time. I said, “Good-bye house.” Before the door closed I noticed a little piece of wood high on an unused shelf. It was Doug’s parting gift from his previous ministry. Amazingly it said “I HOPE YOU DANCE!” A sweet closing. “A God kiss.”

I was graciously offered the opportunity to merge my private practice with Grace Counseling. This was an amazing miracle. I no longer worked alone and lived alone. “A God Kiss.”

There were and are so many miraculous “God Kisses.” God showered His love on me in the midst of tragedy and despair. God grabbed my heart and soul for His residence, never to leave me nor forsake me. Jesus cried tears of blood in the garden of Gethsemane,



There were and are so many miraculous “God Kisses.” God showered His love on me in the midst of tragedy and despair. God grabbed my heart and soul for His residence, never to leave me nor forsake me. Jesus cried tears of blood in the garden of Gethsemane, pleading not to complete the rest of the journey God laid forth for Him. God holds my flooding tears with great understanding, love, compassion and care for the new, unwanted journey.

pleading not to complete the rest of the journey God laid forth for Him. God holds my flooding tears with great understanding, love, compassion and care for the new, unwanted journey.

Doug was a minister. A leader in Denver known for mentoring men, and he had a heart of grace and a heart for grace. So many ministers and missionaries we serve at QuietWaters are experiencing a dying in their lives. Death of a marriage as they knew it. Death of the ministry they invested their all in for God, faith, and hope. At times the cost is the dying of themselves.

Grief is uncomfortable to be around. Grief has no destination. The loss is forever and so is grief. Jesus went

into people’s messy lives. He stays in messiness. Quotes from Scripture that say “This is for a reason,” “God is your husband now,” “All things shall work together for those who love the Lord”—these quotes are not meant for the grieving.

Grief comes in all forms. As the losses accumulate, it can become very traumatic. I believe about 80% of therapy is grieving a life you once believed in and lived. Now your life is over with no map to move ahead. There is not a correct way to grieve. Stages and phases imply a locked-in process. Grief has no “shoulds.” Grief is messy. Grief takes time. Shakespeare said “Give sorrow words; the grief that doesn’t speak whispers o’er the fraught heart and bids it break.” Grief is a solo journey which should not be travelled alone.

We as Christians can mess up a person’s grieving process. God created Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam had complete communion with God. Yet God said, “It is not good for man to be alone.” God knew we needed human touch, human love, human tenderness, a human being to hold our confidences, a person who knows you and whom you know, someone with a shared history. If you are widowed you will always yearn for your lost lover. When your husband dies, it tears the muscles of your heart apart. A ripping and tearing of human flesh.

As a counselor at QuietWaters Ministries, it is my humble privilege and honor to allow pastors, missionaries and their families the time and space to birth their grief. I sink my hands

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into the messiness of their pain, betrayal, loss of faith, anger, lost love, lost job, loss of respect and... their grief. My calling is to offer God’s grace, love, and accountability; then let God be the judge. There but for the grace of God go I. Then for the grace of God I will go.

There will be redemption in time. A time when God will want me to incorporate my story into His mission. I don’t know what that is yet. I am waiting patiently in the grief process, for that is the job for now. ■



Vicki Johnson, MSW, LCSW

*Victoria Johnson earned her Masters in Social Work in 1990. She is a QuietWaters and private practice counselor. Victoria has three married daughters and six wonderful grandchildren.*

# HOPE 9-1-1

by Tricia Lott Williford

## My hope flatlined with his heartbeat.

**“He won’t die,  
but he will feel  
like he’s going to.”**

That’s what the ER doctor said to me as I sat next to my husband just three days before Christmas. Robb was 35 years old and generally healthy, but on that day a strange virus had taken hold of Robb’s body, wracking him with shaking tremors and deep, painful aches. The ER team had run a series of tests that indicated he had Influenza A, and they sent us home with a prescription to rest, drink fluids, and ride out the holidays.

We didn’t know that Robb’s symptoms masked a far more dangerous problem: he had a septic infection in his blood stream that was on its way to attack his heart and lungs. He had become toxic to himself, and he would live for only a few more hours.

On the last night of his life, Robb asked me to sleep downstairs on the couch. He said, “I can’t tell you how terrible I feel, baby girl. But you can’t get this. Please sleep downstairs, and I’ll call you if I need you.” I snuggled up with blankets and pillows by the Christmas tree, and I prayed us to sleep.

Just before 5:00 in the morning on December 23, my cell phone rang with the ringtone that was uniquely his. I picked up the phone as I rushed up the stairs, skipping them two at a time. “Babe, I need you,” he said. “I can’t slow down my breathing.”

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I could hear the doctor’s voice in my head as I recalled his instructions: “This is a respiratory flu, so if he has any trouble breathing, call 9-1-1.”

I sprang to action doing many things at once: as I dialed 9-1-1 and called for help, I promised Robb he would be okay while I searched through my drawers for clothes I could wear to the hospital when the paramedics arrived. My mind unfolded with dozens of thoughts and decisions, hopes and presumptions, in only a matter of seconds. That’s when I heard him fall to the floor. He had lost consciousness, and his body lay in a heap next to our bed.

I screamed into the phone, begging the dispatcher to tell me what to do, to please help me. Ultimately, I was begging her to keep his life from slipping through my fingers, to keep my world from crashing.

For a moment, Robb regained consciousness, and in one last valiant effort he pushed himself into a sitting position, rested his head against the wall, and found me with his eyes.

I like to think it was a decision on his part, that he wouldn’t leave this world without looking at me just one more time.

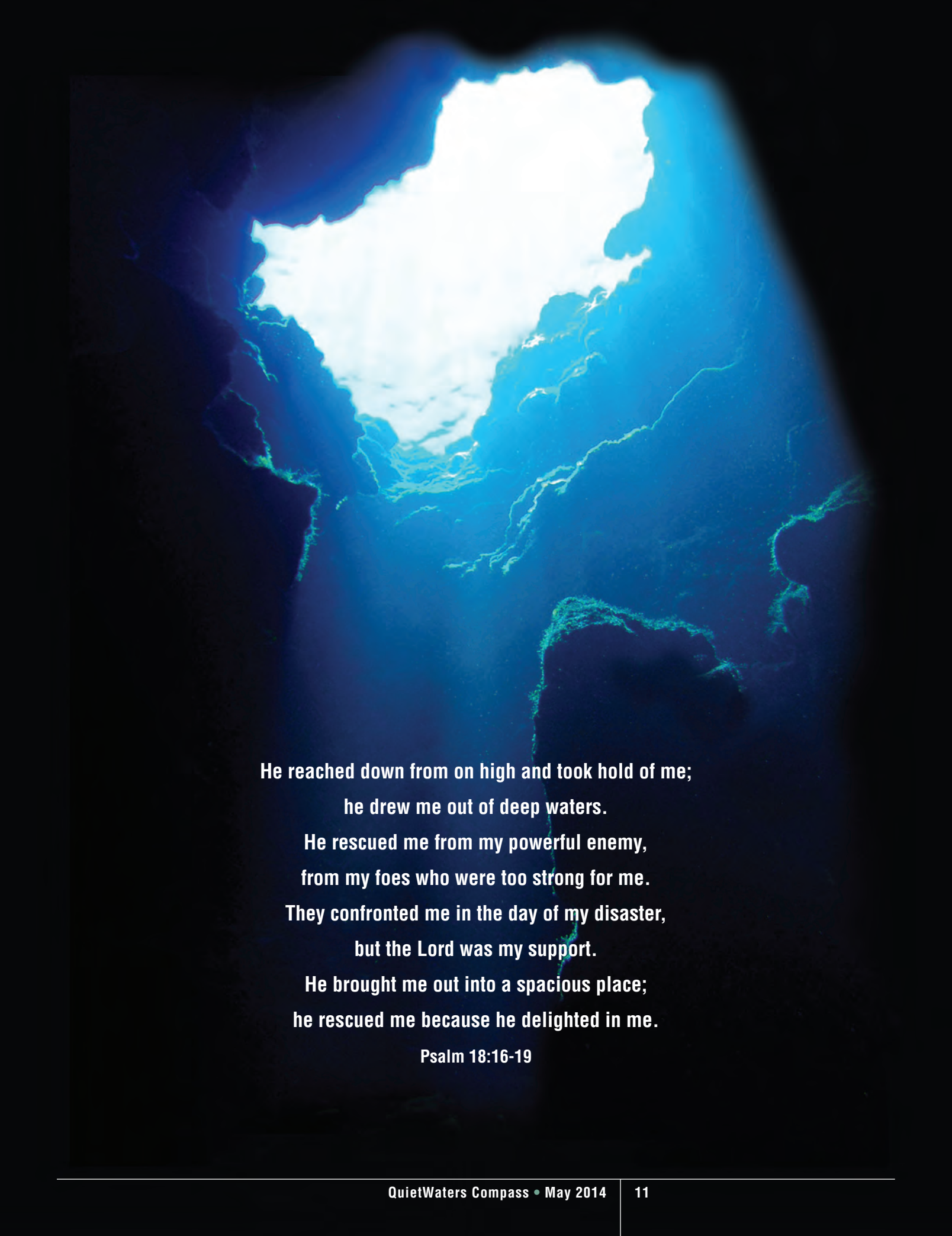
I held his face in my hands as his eyes rolled back. I begged him not to leave me as I watched his color change to a blue grey. In one last exhale, he was gone. Before the paramedics could arrive, Robb’s spirit had slipped right through my fingers.

It was two days before Christmas. I was thirty-one years old, a widow, and very suddenly a single mom to our two children who were not yet in kindergarten. On Christmas Eve, while other families were wrapping gifts and putting cookies out for Santa, I met with a funeral director and learned how to use words like death certificate, coroner, cause of death, and cremation.

Thus began the longest winter of my life. Not on the calendar, but within me. Days began and ended, came and went. Holidays passed me by. Every day looked the same—my husband never came home from work again. Weeks turned into months of the fiercest, cold depression. It was a deep and lonely valley, a dark and wordless place.

My five-year-old worked to become fully independent; he lost one parent overnight, and he planned to be fully prepared in case he lost me too. For months, we finished his bedtime routine by talking through the people in line to take care of him.

*(Continued on page 12)*



He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.

He rescued me from my powerful enemy,  
from my foes who were too strong for me.  
They confronted me in the day of my disaster,  
but the Lord was my support.

He brought me out into a spacious place;  
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

Psalm 18:16-19



“Mommy, what if you die?” I couldn’t promise him I wouldn’t. So I answered him, night after night.

“Baby, if I die, then Grandma and Poppa would take care of you.”

“And what if they die?”

“Then Uncle Rob and Aunt Kate would keep you and love you forever.”

“And what if they die?”

Every night, we repeated this conversation, listing the people all over the country, in Robb’s family and mine, who would step in to love him and take care of him, just in case everyone in his life died suddenly.

My three-year-old stopped changing his clothes. Ever. For weeks, he wore two items of clothing: his Thomas the Train jammies, or his Lightning McQueen t-shirt. Because when you’re three years old and the bottom falls out of your world, you will fight to stay in charge of the one thing you can control: what you will wear today. For weeks, he wore the same clothes, and for weeks, I let him.

The bottom fell out of our world. Our family of four became three. There was an empty seat at the dinner table. Once we had been a wagon; now we were a tricycle. We entered an endless winter. My hope lost its heartbeat.

Days turned into weeks turned into months, and my life became about one day at a time. One morning. One meal. One cup of coffee. One bedtime routine. One hour at a time. One more day completed, only for me to start over the next day.

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Some days felt endless, a gray cloud following me. Icy snow in my yard and in my spirit. Some days brought sunshine, unexpected rays that fell upon my face, my hair, my mind. But as one day streamed into the next, somehow one month passed. And then two. And then three. Ninety days passed slowly; three months escaped too fast.

People would say, “Oh, three months—that’s not a very long time.” Well, yes and no. In the scope of a lifetime, no it’s not very long. But if you count the number of meals I had eaten without him across the table, how many things I wanted to tell him, how many times I reached for my phone to shoot him a quick text—then yes, actually, I lived in an endless stretch of life without him. And since I don’t know the mind or the timing of Christ, I could assume that these three months were only a drop in the bucket of how long I will do this without him.

Slowly and sometimes all of a sudden, I began to see signs of healing; my heart sang more often, and the days of despair no longer came in sequence. I cried less than I once did, but I came to learn that this could be because I had run dry. Sometimes I wished for the cleansing of tears, for the relief of a good cry.

I felt strange to put myself to bed and think, “Wow. I didn’t cry today,” hand in hand with, “Man, I wish I had.” It was really one big dichotomy.

I felt oddly torn between wanting to fast forward to a safer, cleaner, sorted place where things make sense, and the alternate desire of wanting everything to slow down. My mind can’t recall his laugh as easily. I fear time will take it away.

I have struggled to reconcile what I know about God and how he cares for those he loves. In John 6, he writes about the many followers of Jesus who turned away because some of his teachings were so hard for them to swallow. They were offended; they couldn’t understand; they walked away. He asked more than they wanted to give, and he only offered himself in return. They were finished. No deal.

As so many began to slip away, John says that Jesus turned to his disciples and said, “Are you also going to leave?”

I imagine their tension. Perhaps they wanted to. Perhaps an easier road was far more appealing. I get that. I do. He called them to make a decision.

Simon Peter, one of my favorites, is the first to speak: “Lord, to whom would we go?”

(Continued on page 14)



As I write today, I've lived for more than three years without Robb. In fact, my youngest son has now had more days without his dad than he had with him. I have spent three years on my knees as I have learned to live again. My prayers have been schizophrenic psalms from anger to praise, sometimes in the same breath. Graciously, God has answered many of my prayers as I hoped. Some have not been answered, or at least not as I had expected they would be. Others continue to be delayed until some days I feel like my heart could break yet again and deeper still.

I get this story anew. It makes sense to me. I feel like he asks me everyday, in the pages of my journal, “What about you? Are you going to leave?”

I want to. But where would I go?

As the spirit in me threatens to be snuffed by sorrow and loss (of love, security, identity, confidence, the list goes on...), it seems he offers my only hope for life again, for coming back to life myself. Where else could I go?

“Well, he won’t give you more than you can handle, Tricia.”

People mean well. They mean to tell me that God is faithful, he will walk beside me, and this will not take me down—that I am equipped for this journey.

But I beg to differ. I can’t handle this. I can’t handle a single day of it. I am not equipped. And just as I seem to ascend from one valley of this journey, I find myself on the precipice of another. I cannot handle this, and there is no place in the Bible where he promises not to give more than I can handle.

He says he is faithful. He says he is the I Am. He promises not to forsake me. He says his compassions never fail, his mercies are new every morning. He says that when I am faced with temptation, he will offer a way out.

But he never says he’ll not give me more than I can handle.

Because the truth is, it’s in this horrific, deep, tragic place, in the drowning depths of my heart’s deepest ocean, that only he can handle it. Then he is glorified, because only he can handle this.

I cannot handle this, but I trust that he can. I trust that he is faithful, his

**The truth is, it’s in this horrific, deep, tragic place, in the drowning depths of my heart’s deepest ocean, that only he can handle it. Then he is glorified, because only he can handle this.**

**I cannot handle this, but I trust that he can. I trust that he is faithful, his compassions never end, his mercies are new, he sees me, and he will deliver me.**

compassions never end, his mercies are new, he sees me, and he will deliver me.

As I write today, I’ve lived for more than three years without Robb. In fact, my youngest son has now had more days without his dad than he had with him. I have spent three years on my knees as I have learned to live again. My prayers have been schizophrenic psalms from anger to praise, sometimes in the same breath. Graciously, God has answered many of my prayers as I hoped. Some have not been answered, or at least not as I had expected they would be. Others continue to be delayed until some days I feel like my heart could break yet again and deeper still.

Some of our prayers were flat-out denied. Tyler told me one day, “I’m asking God to bring Daddy back to me.”

I said, “Oh, sweetheart, that’s just not possible.”

“Mommy,” he said, “That’s why I’m asking God.”

Still, as you might imagine, God didn’t say yes. But here’s what I know for sure: in all my questions and asks, never have I asked for one day’s portion of grace and not received it.

Ask for grace with whatever tone you need to use with a God who created our emotions and can certainly handle what you’re feeling. Try not to worry about whether there will be enough for tomorrow. There will be.

There will be grace in the morning, and you simply must live the next day.

**He reached down from on high and took hold of me;  
he drew me out of deep waters.**

**He rescued me from my powerful enemy,**

**from my foes who were too strong for me.**

**They confronted me in the day of my disaster,**

**but the Lord was my support.**

**He brought me out into a spacious place;**

**he rescued me because he delighted in me.**

**Psalms 18:16-19 ■**



**Tricia Lott Williford**

*Tricia Lott Williford’s great loves are teaching, writing, and her two young sons, Tucker and Tyler. Tricia is a highly sought after speaker and teacher for events and retreats all over the country.*



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**“He leads me beside quiet waters.” Psalm 23:2**

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