MORE GLIMPSES OF HEAVEN

Inspiring True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life’s Journey

Trudy Harris, RN
Conversations . . .

Look at Me and no one else,
See none but Me, My child.
Compare not yourself to others now,
Consider Me awhile.

Do not be distracted by anyone, anything,
Look past all else to Me.
I will show you all I have
And all I want you to be.

Spend time with Me, My little one,
The rush should stop for now.
Listen to Me softly speak to you,
I will show you how.

So many things get in the way,
Time speeds by, you see.
Soon it will be over for you, My child,
What will be will be.

So much work yet to be done,
I need your hands, your heart.
Listen carefully while I tell you so,
My wisdom and gentleness I impart.

Trudy Harris
Contents

Contributors’ Stories    11
Acknowledgments    13
Introduction    15

☉ ∞ Sally “He wanted her to see herself as beautiful one last time”    19
☉ ∞ Marie “Oh, darlin’, either way I win”    22
☉ ∞ Donny “It will be okay, Miss Bonnie, you don’t have to cry”    27
☉ ∞ Evelyn “God is making your place in heaven, and you will be with Him today”    32
☉ ∞ Sam “See that little girl sitting in the chair? She is here to help me die”    35
☉ ∞ Alex “I am ready to meet my Commander now”    39
☉ ∞ Dolly “Heal the brokenhearted, bring comfort to those in pain”    42
☉ ∞ David “Brave little soldier”    45
☉ ∞ Dorothy “A goat named Daisy followed the horse into the room”    48
☉ ∞ Henry “I felt the Holy Spirit nudge me in a way I had never experienced before”    52
☉ ∞ Mr. D. “There must be something nice about him that I don’t know about”    56
Contents

- **Karla** “It is not good for man to be alone” 60
- **Gerald and Mary** “Walk on into heaven now, Jesus is waiting for you” 64
- **Mr. Winters** “Your paperwork is now finished, there is nothing left to be done” 68
- **Luke** “Oh God, I can’t go now, I can’t go now” 71
- **Matt** “This angel man comes and sits on my bed” 74
- **Cara** “I feel so sorry for him; he is so sad” 77
- **James** “Are you finished now? I love you too” 81
- **Jessica** “Last night, this beautiful man came into my room, dressed all in white” 85
- **Krista** “She loved him as deeply as Mary loved Jesus” 88
- **Sarah** “He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit” 92
- **Jim** “I am sending someone who will know just what to say” 95
- **Douglas** “His little hands reached up and tried to open the lid of the casket” 99
- **Lois** “She never wavered in her commitment to what is of God” 104
- **Ronald** “We are often visited by angels unaware” 110
- **Ellen** “Something is holding her; you need to find out what it is” 114
- **Joseph** “Can you see the angels and the beautiful gold lights shining from them?” 118
- **Charlie** “He could not share the gospel boldly until he received the fullness of the Holy Spirit” 121
- **Levi** “In that moment, God Himself gave the words to me” 126
- **Todd** “The Lord works in mysterious ways” 130
- **Leonard** “I just want to believe” 134
- **Rudy** “How can anyone not believe in God when they see how beautiful my vegetable garden is?” 138
- **Naomi** “Why is she not talking to any of us?” 143
- **Father Jack** “Yes, I remember you well” 146
Contents

- **Ed** “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death” 150
- **Anna** “Trudy, it’s only about love” 155
- **Richard** “What should I tell her? What will I say?” 159
- **Joni** “Mama, Jesus has me by the hand. I have to go now” 163
- **Darleen** “God entered into that quiet through the simplicity and grace of Father O’Flynn” 167
- **Tom** “I have to tell you a story, and I hope you don’t think I’m crazy” 170
- **Matthew** “Today you will be with me in Paradise” 173
- **Marsha** “Will you please pray the 23rd Psalm with me?” 177
- **Kenneth** “I am dying, honey, but do my children know?” 180
- **Helen** “I had to learn how to forgive” 183
- **Cathy** “The greatest of these is love” 187
- **Maureen** “Mommy is sitting on the foot of my bed right now” 191

Conclusion 201
Introduction

We see and experience God more often than we know. He often hides in plain sight, and we encounter Him many more times a day than we realize, in the people and experiences He puts on our path. When Jesus said, “The kingdom of God is at hand,” was He asking us to recognize His presence and that of His Father in our everyday living? Do we allow ourselves the silence He calls us to in order to sit still long enough to see and hear Him?

The term “kingdom of God” has always been one of my favorite biblical phrases. In my mind, it means that wherever and whenever God’s presence is seen, recognized, or experienced by His people, God is there in the midst of them. When we see love in action, compassion in the face of hatred or anger, forgiveness in the face of pain and suffering, we are looking at and experiencing the kingdom of God right where we stand. How wonderful that our Jesus, fully human, fully divine, invites us to participate with Him in the kingdom of God here and now, every day.

I heard a young priest’s homily recently, during which he asked us where Jesus could be found in our lives. He spoke about recognizing Him in the marketplace, among the people, in the face of the man who stands by the highway every morning begging, and in those we judge to be...
“less” than what we think they should be. He encouraged us to look carefully in the Scriptures and see how often God’s reign or kingdom was with the poor, the outcasts, and those who lived on the fringes of society. The priest said that in order to find the Jesus we are looking for and to love and follow Him, we must be looking in all the same places Jesus spent His time. If we do not find Him, we must ask ourselves why. When Jesus died, He left us a very clear blueprint to follow. He told us, in the simplest terms possible, that the greatest among us must serve the least, and that in serving others we would really be serving Him.

My earliest recollections are of my parents doing things for others. My mother bringing into our family the child of her dearest friend, when this friend died very young. My dad carrying a co-worker to the car each morning when he could no longer walk. By example, my parents taught us so well to serve others that, for me, Hospice nursing was simply an extension of the life they had lived. Hospice nursing is the purest kind of nursing you can do, and every day you are reminded that you walk on holy ground in preparing God’s children for heaven. Hospice nursing is very intimately participating in the kingdom of God that Jesus spoke about.

In Glimpses of Heaven: True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life’s Journey, I shared the stories of God’s intimate involvement with His children and reflected on how often He allows them to hear His voice deep within their souls as they are dying. As often as these experiences occur, at the end of life, God invites us on a daily basis to look for and recognize how He manifests Himself through the needs of others. He shows us how we who are well are called to be His eyes and His ears, His hands and His heart, to those who are not, every day. In order to become one with Jesus and to “put on Christ” as Paul directs us to, we must walk in the footsteps He puts right in front of us to follow.

The publication of Glimpses of Heaven brought an avalanche of letters from other professionals in the field of

---

Trudy Harris, RN,
More Glimpses of Heaven: Inspiring True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life’s Journey,
Introduction

Hospice and palliative care nursing, expressing their own tender and moving accounts of caring for people as they were dying. They were thrilled to see in writing the same kind of experiences they shared with those at the end of life in their care. They too felt equally blessed to have the opportunity to prepare patients to meet their God and to find the peace He was longing to give them.

More Glimpses of Heaven includes more of my own experiences and stories shared with me by other professionals in the field of Hospice and end-of-life care. Each one is a real-life account of a patient who was dying, and in each instance, the caregiver sensed something greater than themselves at work. These stories lend credence to the belief that when our time arrives, we will not be alone. I remember well hearing these stories told by many of the nurses when we gathered for Hospice team meetings in the past. I am most grateful to them for recounting their experiences here for you.

In these stories you will find God’s loving presence reflected in both the lives of those He is calling home to Himself as well as those caring for them. Look for the compassion, forgiveness, generosity, and tenderness of Jesus’s own heart. Do you recognize Him in those who make life easier and more peaceful for others as they are both living and dying? Do you see His humanity and humor reflected through their kindness? He shows us His face in our everyday lives, and if we pay attention, we will see and hear Him. He is inviting us to become part of the kingdom of God here on earth—and what a wonderful invitation it is!

Author’s note: the names, diagnoses, and histories of those portrayed here have been changed to protect their privacy. In those instances where families have asked that the real names of their loved ones be used, I have done so.
“He wanted her to see herself as beautiful one last time”

Trudy Harris

She was so young and lovely, in her late twenties, but she was dying of cervical cancer, which had spread to many parts of her body. There were no more treatments left that would give her more time or make her well again. Her cancer was fast growing, and nothing, not all the love in the world, could change the fact that Sally was going to die.

Her husband, who loved her more than life itself, was heartbroken as he dealt with the reality of life without her in it. He could not comprehend that his two small children would never remember the woman he loved so much and the one who had loved them all well.

He had so much to handle—a job to keep everything going, small children to tend to, a wife to love until there were no more days left for them, and plans to make without her help.

Trudy Harris, RN,
More Glimpses of Heaven: Inspiring True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life’s Journey,
Sally’s pain was such that it could no longer be controlled at home, and so the decision was made to take her to the Hospice Center, where she could be more comfortable and pain free. As hard as the decision was to make, it was the right one and everyone knew it, most of all Sally. At the Hospice Center, family could come and go, taking turns staying with her. Children could visit for short periods of time throughout the day, and things would be more peaceful and serene for them. Her husband could work during the day, which he very badly needed to do, and stay most nights with her while his parents took care of their children.

Time was fleeting, and it became more evident every day that Sally’s young life was ebbing away quickly. She had always been lovely, and to her husband, she still was, but he wanted her to see herself as beautiful one last time. He wanted her to know that she was still beautiful in his eyes and that she always would be. He needed and wanted time alone with her, just the two of them. He asked if he could bathe her alone, and shampoo and blow-dry her hair. He wanted to cover her frail body with her favorite lotion and dress her in her lovely nightgown and robe one last time.

A special bathing room for just such an occasion had been donated to the Hospice Center when it first opened; everything was carefully prepared for this special time, for Sally and her husband.

Special lamps were brought in and dimmed, soft music was playing some of her favorite songs on the CD player, warm water with delicious bath salts was running in the whirlpool bath, and her favorite blue and white gown and robe were hung by the door for her to see.

Her husband brought Sally to the special bathing room in a wheelchair. He lovingly placed her in the delicious-smelling bath with warm, flowing water. He closed the door behind them; it stayed that way for more than an hour.
When it opened again, Sally was smiling from ear to ear, with freshly shampooed and brushed hair. The wonderful body lotion made her skin glisten from top to bottom, and her gown and robe lay softly on her tiny frame. Together she and her husband looked like two young people forever in love. Time stood still for all of us who were watching.

He loved her with a Christlike love, unselfishly and totally devoid of any concern for himself. He wanted her to know that he would always love her and treasure the memory of the love she had for him, in spite of the few short years they’d had to share. He wanted her to see herself as he saw her, as beautiful as ever. And she was.

The medical and nursing staff stepped back that day and took a deep breath, recognizing the depth of love this young husband had for his dying wife—loving, tender, and completely centered on her.

One cannot help but see Jesus in these most exquisite moments, moments given to us to help us understand how to love as He loves. Sally died a short time later, understanding completely that God is love and where love is, that’s where God abides.
Marie was a tiny, five-foot-two, green-eyed southern gal with curly brown hair and a vivacious spirit and sense of humor like no one I had ever met. We lived across the driveway from one another when my husband and I moved from New York to North Carolina. We had much in common, as we were both young nurses newly working in the field of hospital medicine. We instantly became lifelong friends, though two more different people never existed.

Marie was a Charlotte native who was up front and clear, and spoke her mind. A Southern Baptist, she attended church faithfully on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings. As outgoing and friendly as Marie was, her husband, Fred, was a quiet, slow-talking gentleman from Calhoun, Georgia, with a sense of humor equal to hers.

Marie had never personally known any “Yankees” before, and the fact that my husband and I were Catholics was even more intriguing to her. Knowing that we went to

— 22 —
confession, prayed the Rosary, and so on, boggled her mind, but she was always interested in our faith, and we shared many good conversations over the years of our friendship. One of our Catholic practices that gave Marie an impish joy was meatless Fridays. Back in the early 1960s, Fridays were still days on which we did not eat meat (a sacrifice to remind us of the death of Jesus Christ on Good Friday). Marie reveled in lighting up the charcoal grill to cook her thick, juicy hamburgers or hotdogs and calling across the driveway to my husband to let us know we could use the grill for our fish as soon as they were finished. The humor of it all was never lost on anyone.

We were young and quite poor in those days. Marie and Fred owned the grill and washing machine; my husband and I owned the vacuum cleaner and television. We shared everything, and parents from either side could find us in each other’s homes, using the shared equipment any time of the day or night. My mother, visiting from New York one afternoon, let herself into our apartment only to find Fred watching television and getting ready to leave with the vacuum. Such was our wonderful friendship.

One Sunday when Marie and Fred were attending church (their Baptist services lasted three to four hours), I forgot to put the hose in the sink while I was doing laundry in their washing machine. When Marie came home, her entire living room was floating on a bed of soapsuds, and it took all four of us the rest of the day to clean it up. Marie told me years later that she had to “lean upon the Lord” and every lesson He had ever taught her to get through that mess and to forgive me. But forgive me she did.

Marie and I had our babies at about the same time, were in the delivery rooms for one another, stayed close, and shared many a prayer during both good times and bad. Although we did not see each other often during our different moves in and out of the area, we remained once-in-a-lifetime friends.
Marie worked her entire adult life in a hospital setting as floor nurse, supervisor, and educator, and she wore any hat needed to further the cause of good nursing care in a large medical center in Charlotte, North Carolina.

In every aspect of her life she applied the love of Jesus Christ. She shared Him with abandon, and over the years we had many, many rollicking conversations about the things we understood differently and the things we understood in the same way, growing each other in faith, never with any animosity at all.

Marie had fought through several bouts of cancer, always moving through her experiences with a confidence borne of deep faith and trust in Jesus Christ. One experience stands out above all the rest. Beside her breast cancer and her kidney cancer (both ultimately removed), Marie had a tumor in the aorta of her heart. Her physician explained that she had a fifty-fifty chance of making it through the surgery, but Marie neither felt nor expressed one iota of concern. Her surgeon explained to a room filled with Marie’s church friends that the surgery would take four to five hours, and that she could easily die on the operating table. This was a faithful and prayerful group, and they depended on more than the surgeon’s words. They had God on their side.

Before surgery, Marie gave her surgeon a picture, which he kept in his scrubs during surgery. The picture was of Jesus in an operating room, with his hands beneath the surgeon’s, reflecting Marie’s and everyone’s prayer that Jesus Himself would perform her surgery. When the surgeon came into the waiting room less than an hour later, everyone’s hearts stopped, fearing the worst. But God had a different plan. The surgeon explained that before he made the cut into the aorta, he had put into place a few safety measures just in case things did not go well. He also had a cardiac surgeon at the ready. He then carefully made the most difficult and risky incision into Marie’s aorta, and the
tumor simply slipped into his fingers, with no effort at all on his part. He was as much in awe about what had happened as those who were now listening to him. Marie sent me a copy of the picture of Jesus in the operating room, which I treasure to this day.

By early 2008 Marie’s cancer of the breast, cancer of the kidney, and other medical challenges had taken their toll on her. She was on full peritoneal dialysis by this time, as she had no kidney function left. She was in and out of the hospital, always attracting people around her with the same humor and faith she had exhibited her entire life, but now she was declining. She spoke of her pastor and how faithful and kind he had always been to her. Her friends cherished her dearly, and not a day went by that they were not visiting and loving her in the full measure with which she had loved them.

In spite of everything, she had made up her mind to come to Jacksonville, Florida, to surprise me at my first public book signing for *Glimpses of Heaven*. I do not think I ever saw a bigger smile or happier person in my life than when I saw her as she walked in the door. I was thrilled to see her and Fred and could barely believe they had driven seven hours to get there with her dialysis equipment in tow. She regaled everyone near her with stories of our younger days together and was loved immediately by everyone who was listening.

Fred had been a loving and faithful husband to Marie for more than forty-nine years, and they cherished each other in the tenderest ways possible. They were true friends and shared a sense of humor about almost everything and could be found laughing together even under the direst of circumstances. She adored her daughters, Kimberly and Allison, and their families, and she received back all the affection and love she had showered on them all their lives.

One afternoon when we were speaking on the phone, she asked when I could get up to see her, and I promised
in the next two weeks, as my daughter-in-law was having surgery in her city at that time. I did not realize just how close Marie was to going to heaven. In the most gentle and intimate tone, she told me how much she had always loved me. The conversation felt like Mary’s visit with her cousin Elizabeth as told in Scripture, when they were totally dependent on and trusting in the God who loved them. She spoke in the very same way now, trusting that she was safe in His care no matter what, and longing to see Him face-to-face if that was His will. “Oh, darlin’,” she said to me in her sweetest southern drawl, “either way I win. If I get through this episode and go home, then I win because I will have more time with Fred and the girls. If I don’t get through this episode, then I win anyway, because I will be with my Lord and Savior, and I know that will be everything He promised me it would be.”

She spoke of lifelong friendships and how God ordains them for His very own purposes. It was one of the most loving conversations I have ever had with a friend, and I remember it, word for word, to this day. Marie died a few days later surrounded by her family and friends, and safe in the arms of her Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. She had proclaimed Him to everyone she ever met all her life, and now she would see Him face-to-face for all eternity. I am more than certain that when He saw her coming, He went out to meet her, knowing that whatever she had to say would bring a smile to His face.