

SEASONS *of* Change

DEBORAH BORMAN • GINNY GRAHAM
BARB HOWE • KAREN INGLE • LIZ KIMMEL
MARIANNE MCDONOUGH • JANET OLIVER
DONALD ROOME • J.B. SISAM • BARB WINFIELD



MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

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INTRODUCTION

The Minnesota Christian Writers Guild is a not-for-profit organization that began nearly 70 years ago and is dedicated to helping writers in all stages of their careers take their craft to the next level.

This book, *Seasons of Change*, is dedicated to all writers who desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ through their written words.

Each story is based in the beautiful state of Minnesota and reflects upon some aspect of seasons – whether it relates to life, sports, or the calendar. Life without change would not be life. It normal, continual, and expected. Our hope throughout remains in Jesus, who will be with us through our trials and joys in every season.

We pray you come to treasure each story in this powerful anthology.

For more information about our organization, visit
MNCHRISTIANWRITERS.COM

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WATERCOLOR SKY

BY DEBORAH BORMAN



Deborah Borman lives in Minnesota with her husband and achieved empty-nester status as of 2021. Graduating from Gustavus Adolphus with degrees in Psychology/Criminal Justice, Deborah worked in social work before staying at home to homeschool their three children and care for her husband after his stroke in 2009.

Deborah has written devotionals for *With God I Will Not Fear*, to be published early 2023 by Chosen Books, as well as a 21-day devotional for staff serving at *Joni and Friends Ministry Family Retreats*. She also enjoys writing middle grade and young adult fiction with themes of redemption and hopes to help young people experience the joy of reading.

Recent highlights in Deborah's life have been trips to London with her two daughters and Washington D.C. with her son. She also loves meeting with other women, guitar music, and an occasional rousing game of table tennis.

Please contact her at deb@jbsc.com.

ONE

“Keep your eye out for deer!”

Excitement tingled through Sami’s tired but gloriously-tense body as her dad spoke the familiar words and switched on the Chrysler’s high beams. The July sun had already set, and the tall, dark-shadowed pines lining the narrow highway signaled the final twenty miles to her grandparents’ home north of Bemidji. Inspired by her dad’s words and thinking he hoped to see deer as much as she did, the eager ten-year-old took her position as “sentinel-on-the-backseat-hump.” She stared intently into the spray of light illuminating the gravel and grassy ditches ahead.

Twenty miles later and no deer sightings to show for it, the car tires slowly crunched the last loose rocks as Sami’s dad turned off the unpaved road and onto the smooth cement driveway of Grandpa Leo’s garage. From a side door stepped a trim, salt-and-pepper-haired man wearing a blue mechanic’s suit, wiping engine grease from his hands with an oil-stained towel.

“Well, there ye be,” her grandpa greeted them amiably as the four travelers unfurled their stiff bodies from the car like butterflies from a cocoon.

“Grandpa, we didn’t see any deer!” Sami complained, first to escape the packed backseat and run to meet him.

“Doesn’t surprise me,” Grandpa Leo replied, tossing aside the rag and giving her a hug. “There’s been a fire on the reservation, and they’re running a little skittish. You might not see any while you’re here.” Grandpa Leo always spoke very calmly. Known to be somewhat of an “animal-whisperer,” he enjoyed carrying on conversations with the birds, raccoon, fox, and deer that shared his 40-acre property in the Minnesota Northwoods. Even the squirrels and chipmunks received his kind attention, and Sami would often hear him say in his soft, low voice, “Well, hello there, little one. How are you today?” He’d continue on with some small talk about the weather and whatever else he thought relevant in the little critter’s life.

Hearing Grandpa Leo’s news about the deer, Sami’s small shoulders drooped. She remembered her embarrassment during their visit last summer when she had come around the back corner of the house to find a beautiful white-tailed doe standing 20 yards away, munching on some mowed grass. In her excitement, she had yelled to her grandpa to come see it. By the time he had reached the door of the garage, the frightened creature had bounded away.

“You need to stay very quiet and calm, or you will scare them off,” Grandpa Leo had told her gently, which of course she knew and felt both embarrassed and sad but mostly embarrassed. The excitement of seeing a deer so close had gotten the best of her. For the rest of their week up north that summer, Sami kept a lookout on the edges of the woods and the nearby

WATERCOLOR SKY

fields of alfalfa and wildflowers. Much to her disappointment, however, she didn't see another deer their entire visit. Regret tucked itself like a sharp cocklebur deep in her sensitive heart.

But this was a new summer, and Sami's hopes of seeing a deer this year were as high as the bright new moon. As her mom and dad unpacked the car, Sami and her younger brother Jesse helped carry their things to the double-wide trailer their grandparents called home. With arms and heart full, Sami walked slowly down the cement sidewalk, pausing at the spot she had seen the doe the previous summer. With a whisper, she prayed to Jesus for another chance to see the gentle animals she loved so much. She hoped to redeem last summer's mistake and show her grandpa that she could stay calm like him and show the animals she was their friend.

A DOG NAMED MONEY

BY GINNY GRAHAM



Ginny Graham's writing touches on the complications faced by widows. And, in the case of this short story, widowers. Spouses are an interdependent team who each find meaning and function in the other. Her writing seeks to touch on the complexities faced by those experiencing the loss of a spouse.

With a degree in business administration, Ginny has a background in sales and marketing and experience as a small-business owner. She now writes full-time.

When Ginny is not writing, she serves as a Sunday School teacher, a choir member, and in women's ministries at her church. Her hobbies include writing, reading, hiking, sewing, gardening, and horseback riding. At the top of her list, she enjoys the treasure of spending time with her family. She is a widowed mother of two sons. God has blessed her with two daughters-in-law and eight grandchildren. She lives in Pine Island, Minnesota.

ONE

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

— *I TIMOTHY 6:10 (NIV)*

Ward Bluffington didn't know where the dog came from or why he answered to the name of Money. He just showed up during a blustery November day—the kind that reminds you of fall chores you should finish before the snow flies. And chores you'd rather ignore, like getting rid of a dead tree. Daniel Swanson, that upstart of a next-door neighbor's child, reminded him he had agreed to pay half to remove a tree that fell into Ward's yard.

Ward glared at his pint-sized nine-year-old neighbor. “What do you think I am? Made of MONEY?”

A dog came out of nowhere, nudged Ward's leg, and wagged his tail to beat the band.

"Is that your dog?" Ward scowled at Daniel.

"No, never seen him before," Daniel said. "But I think his name is Money."

The dog wheeled and tried to lick the boy's face.

"Money? No dog's named Money."

The dog barked and pressed its shoulder against Ward's leg in response.

"Someone should call animal protection and get rid of him." Ward shoved his knee into the dog to push it aside. "Now, why does your dad want so much to get rid of that dead tree?"

"The tree service wanted five hundred dollars, but dad found a friend who charged a hundred and fifty. Your half is seventy-five. You told him to get rid of it, and you would pay half. Remember?"

"I'm retired, but I still have a mind." Ward scratched his head of gray, thinning hair. "Wait here."

The storm door creaked in protest when Ward yanked it open. Huffing, he jiggled the knob of the old inner door and pushed through it. After five minutes, he returned and handed Daniel the cash.

"Thanks, Mr. Bluff."

"That's Bluffington."

"Oh, sorry, Mr. Bluffington." Daniel flew down the steps and slapped his leg. "Money, wanna come home with me?"

The blur of a boy and a dog raced across the yard. Still standing on his front porch, Ward shook his head as he heard Daniel fling open his front door and call the dog. "Come on, Money, it's okay. Come inside."

With a mad dash, Money cleared the Swansons' threshold.

"Mom! Can we keep him? Look at the dog I found."

Daniel's voice echoed down the street.

"Would someone please close the door?" A baby's startled cry punctuated Daniel's mother's pleading to keep the cold outdoors.

Ward plodded toward his computer in his former dining room. A computer desk replaced the old dining room table, the only change to the home's interior since his wife had died.

Daniel's words seared through him. "Mr. Bluff. Humph. Wonder if that's what people always called me behind my back." He spoke aloud. He did that frequently. "Maybe that's why I barely survived selling used cars. Never made it big."

But he'd made it big now—a day trader. Retirement felt good. In his younger days, he'd loved cars, fixing and fine-tuning them, but eventually, it became a life of plodding through a job that held little interest for him. Then, five years ago, a friend introduced him to the world of trading. A few mistakes. A few wins. Then he leveled off and watched, amazed as his retirement account grew. His portfolio hit his goal of a million last year—time for a new goal. With a smirk, he headed for his computer. He couldn't wait to see where the markets had landed after closing, and he had just wasted fifteen minutes. He opened his laptop. His heart raced up and down along with the multi-colored indicators of exponential moving averages.

Following a possible turn in the market, he recognized an opportunity for a short-scalp trade. His diligence paid off. A few minutes later, he leaned back and closed his eyes. A dog barked. Children's cries sifted through the walls of his poorly

insulated home. With the racket in the yard next door, who could concentrate?

Ward peeked through his dining room drapes. That dratted dog was still there, jumping around Daniel as he raked leaves into a pile. His little sister, Zoey, added scant leaves into his stack with her broken rake. Money ran through leaves and demolished their pile. Zoey stopped raking, threw leaves in the air, and shrieked when Money jumped high to catch them.

BETTER THAN A
TROPHY FISH

BY BARB HOWE



BARB HOWE first ventured into the art of storytelling as a child during sleepovers with girlfriends. As an adult, she utilized these skills while working in higher education, health care, church, and freelance settings before putting her pen to several family memoirs and conducting community education classes on the art of memoir writing. When she became a grandparent, Howe considered the impact her life and writing would have on the newest member of her family. That awareness prompted her to commit to being an intentional Christian grandparent.

Currently, Howe is content editor and contributor for Christian Grandparenting Network. She has been published in Focus on the Family Clubhouse Jr. magazine, a Guideposts Book, blogs, and numerous other articles. Her first book of fiction for teens and young adults, *Stormy Encounters*, is planned to release in spring 2023.

Visit her website at barbhowe.org
or at ChristianGrandparenting.com

 facebook.com/Barb-Howe-Author

ONE

The only thing on my mind was winning a trophy. Well, that and showing Babbo I could catch one as big as he could.

Jake's my name. I have a younger sister named Jesse and parents named James (Jimmy) and Joanna (Jo) Jardinelli. They decided the "J" naming thing was a good idea for some reason. I don't entirely understand, but it makes for easy conversation starters. Well, enough of that. Fishing is the thing I want to talk about, in this case, a specific fishing event, our town's annual Firecracker Fishing Tournament. It's a summer tradition at our house.

Like always, Babbo set his sights on winning the grand prize. This year, it's a 14-foot Lund fishing boat. No, not one of those fancy ones with built-in live wells and places to stash your poles and tackle. I'm talking about a simple aluminum job with a 10hp outboard motor mounted on the back. Babbo always wanted a fishing boat, but as soon as he came close to saving enough money to buy one, something more important

came up. First, there was the down payment on our house, and then there was me being born, a new car, my sister being born prematurely, braces for my crooked teeth, and, well, you get the picture.

Mamma was good at putting a kibosh on Babbo's boat fantasies with a few words, something like, "Jimmy, we're having a baby," or "Jimmy, we need a car more than we need a boat," or "Jimmy, we need a new furnace."

Last year, Babbo came in a close second to the grand prize, a mere three ounces short of the winner's haul of largemouth and smallmouth bass. He picked up some nice trophies and awards twice in other contests for bringing in the most fish, and twice for the biggest single fish. But he never won the grand prize of the largest total catch by weight, and it bugged him. He was pretty sure this would be his year. I could tell by the way he waved his hands around when he talked, which he does a lot, being he's an Italian American.

"Did you load the bait bucket into the truck?"

"Yeah, Babbo. That was the first thing on my list."

"Good. How about those new lures we picked up yesterday?"

"Yes. I checked everything off the list you gave me when I put them in the tackle box. It's all there." I popped open the tackle box to show him it was full.

Getting ready for the Firecracker was always exciting at our house, not to mention at every house in the entire town. It's a huge party where spectators sit back and watch the contestants while eating their way through a caravan of offerings from food

BETTER THAN A TROPHY FISH

trucks that ring the judging area. Then there are kiddie games and a rock band to keep the energy level running at full speed. But by far, the most fun is had by the fishermen, of which I'm the most determined, next to Babbo, of course.

As a 16-year-old, this is my first time competing in the adult division side by side with my father in a rental boat. Theoretically, we could both get our wishes from the same contest: him winning the grand prize and me getting at least one fish that's bigger than any in his catch. It would be pretty cool to get our picture in the local paper for that kind of outcome. So with that carrot dangling in my imagination like a prized lure, I helped Babbo get ready. We filled the tackle box ahead of time because we didn't want anything to slow us down from hitting the lake when the starting horn sounded. I fell asleep dreaming about the colossal fish I would handily yank out of the lake. Think Jonah and the whale size.

Then it happened. A huge thunderstorm jarred me out of bed at 3 a.m. I stared out of the window in disbelief while Babbo scanned the local weather reports. Instead of clearing skies, our friendly meteorologist warned that conditions would worsen. Sporting a toothy smile, he advised that we might even get a tornado out of this band of dense, fun-killing clouds. We both wondered if the tournament organizers would cancel the fishing contest. That never happened in its twenty-year history.

"We're already registered. Let's go to the lake and see what's happening," Babbo said. "We might at least get one of the goodie bags sponsors put together for participants."

Those bags were packed with new lures and artificial baits donated by local sporting goods stores. Some of my best ones came from them, and it would be super nice to have a few

BY BARB HOWE

extras as backup. Plus, it's cool to have some freebies to give away to the rookie fishermen we meet at the pier during the summer. That said, not everyone in our house was as excited about this fishing tournament as I was.

ALL THE DEEPEST
COLORS

BY KAREN INGLE



Karen Ingle writes stories from the rural southwestern Minnesota home she shares with her husband Dennis. Together, they have raised five adults and a multitude of chickens. Pass her in the aisles at Walmart, and you'll see a rather ordinary woman. But dig deeper and you'll find a lady whose life journey traversed the hills and dales of widowhood, single motherhood, adoption, and more moving than should be legal. Deeper still you'll discover a settled joy the world cannot give.

A freelance writer and author, Karen also serves as communications manager for her local pregnancy center. Her experiences there—combined with her journalistic interviews—have compelled her to launch the Rumors of Light series of Christian romantic suspense novels. The first, *With Me in the Storm*, released in 2022.

Connect with Karen Ingle at
kareningleauthor.com

On social media @kareningleauthor



ONE

If Grandpa and I ever argued, it was only about colors. Or his ancient pickup. Or both.

Bouncing home along the gravel road from town, I kept the driver's side window half open to capture some breeze, since Grandpa's AC didn't work. Over the road noise, I yelled, "That's baloney, Grandpa! This truck of yours is an oxidized robin's egg blue. Complete with little rusty spots."

"Hmph." Grandpa pursed his lips to hide his smirk. "I don't know what's wrong with your eyes, Mike. It's a deep turquoise, the same as the sky in summer. Just like today," he added, waving a gnarled finger toward the top of the windshield.

I smiled as I drove. Grandpa did too. Then he took a long chug of his grapefruit Squirt while drops of condensation dripped from his fingers.

"So," he said, belching softly. "You haven't told me how it went at the high school while I was chewing the fat with Stan at the elevator."

I shrugged. "I let them talk me into it."

He smacked my leg. “Good. Your art teacher is right. You should do a senior exhibit.” He wiped his wet hand on his overalls and added, elbowing me, “Even if your eye for color isn’t the best.”

I shook my head. “Mom won’t like it.” Like she wouldn’t like that I was out here driving Grandpa’s decrepit pickup. “It will eat up lots of my time and energy. She really wants me to do something else with my life. Something I can earn a living at.”

Grandpa looked down at his Squirt can and let out a long breath. Same kind of breath that he usually let out after being around Mom too long.

I rounded the last curve before home and slowed, pumping the old brakes to make them respond. While my feet worked, my whole head turned to let my eyes drink in the glorious sight of our apple orchard spreading uphill north of the road. Hundreds of trees, billions of leaves, at least a dozen shades of green—all rippling in the breeze sweeping the hillside.

“Ditch!” Grandpa said.

I wrenched the steering wheel to the right just as the tall grass slapped inside the wheel well. “Sorry.”

Grandpa shook his head and spoke quietly, eyeing the orchard. “It takes your breath away, doesn’t it?”

His trained eyes scanned the rows of trees that he and countless Richards ancestors had planted. My dad and I had put in the spindly First Kiss saplings in the fourth row. Next year, we hoped to get our hands on some of the University’s new Triumph variety. But I think Grandpa saw more than the apple trees. As I watched him, I had that funny feeling he was seeing something beyond the orchard.

The truck coughed and rolled to a sleepy stop, the engine sputtering.

Grandpa turned his watery eyes on me. “Need a theme for your senior exhibit?”

I blinked. I hadn’t thought that far yet. The show wouldn’t be until spring, anyway, right before my graduation.

Grandpa jerked his chin toward the hillside. “There you go. Free inspiration.”

That seed had barely taken root when insistent tapping hit Grandpa’s window.

Mom. Blond ponytail pulled tight, standing in the south ditch, up to her knees in grass.

I wrestled the gear shift into park while Grandpa rolled his window the rest of the way down.

“Hey, Mom,” I said.

“Get home. Now.” Her eyes flashed past Grandpa at me. Deep frown, hands on hips; all bad news.

“Yes, ma’am,” I said, the only permissible answer.

As I shifted into drive, Grandpa cleared his throat beside me. Years ago, he might have tried to step in and apologize to Mom for making me do something she didn’t like. He finally gave up. Now, as I drove carefully forward so as not to spray Mom with road dust, he just shot me a sympathetic look. And I returned it. Grandpa and I were on the same team. But we still had to live at home.

He would cope by napping in his wooden chair propped against the fence in the shade of the apple trees. His hat tipped forward over his face. I would concentrate on doing everything I was told for the next several days.

A FINCH IN TIME

BY LIZ KIMMEL



LIZ KIMMEL is a poet at heart and creator of supplemental educational resources. She writes for several Guideposts publications, and is included in all of the Short and Sweet books by Grace Publishing to date.

These are collections of stories using words of just one syllable (with a few exceptions). Her most recent book, available by early 2023, is an alliterative retelling of several of the parables of Jesus. Liz spent twenty years working in Medical Records at a local hospital, two years in Trust Operations at Well Fargo Bank, and twenty years in the front office of her church, Bethel Christian Fellowship. She loves her busy life as a retiree. In addition to writing, Liz provides admin support for three nonprofits (Great Commission Media Ministries, Dare to Believe Ministries, and the Minnesota Christian Writers Guild).

She and her husband of forty-three years have two children and four delightful grandchildren.

Website: lizkimmelwordwright.com/

ONE

THE ONSET OF SPRING

Two best friends perched near each other in their favorite birch tree and had a terrific view of the entire community. The buds were just poking their way out of the ends of the branches, but there were no leaves restricting their line of sight yet. Fin balanced effortlessly on the slender branch, while Woody seemed like he was standing vertically on the tree's trunk. There were so many things different about them. Fin had slender feet, a short beak, and a slightly rounded figure. Woody's feet were solid, his beak long, and his shape was more angular. Fin's bright yellow feathers and Woody's black and white ones contrasted sharply with each other, much as their personalities did. As dissimilar as they were, they knew that Maker had designed them both. And though an unlikely duo, they had been comrades since shortly after leaving their nests last year.

They gazed contentedly down at Mr. and Mrs. Krueger's beautiful garden. Fin and Woody loved the gardener's yard, filled with birdbaths and bird feeders and more flowers and

lovely trees than a bird could hope to imagine. The Kruegers were honorary grandparents to every kid (and every bird) on the block. They didn't have any children of their own, but took it upon themselves to make their yard a special, welcoming place for everybody. The feathered friends loved to spend time both in and above their garden.

It was pretty common to see rows of sparrows or ravens lined up on a long segment of power line that stretched over them. That was a great place to hang out and discuss all the goings-on in the neighborhood. But Fin and Woody had staked out this birch tree for their very own. Their friendship was atypical. They'd been coming to this spot to tweet and chirp about many things for as long as they could remember.

A dip in the fountain below was just the thing they needed as they stretched and preened, trying to get all their feathers back in the right places after a night's sleep in the nearby trees. Fin, which was short for his family name of *Finch*, roosted in a nearby willow, but Woody preferred being tucked into the cavity of one of the pine trees. He liked holes (his beak was perfect for making them), and he wanted the safe feeling he got as he squeezed into a crevice at night to dream until the sun (or his hunger) woke him up.

A sip of water refreshed them, and they flitted back up to their observation post in the tree.. From their position high above the ground, they could see their friends returning from the south.

Spring had finally arrived. The geese flew back into town in their neat V-shaped formations and honked loudly at each other. Pretty soon the robins were there, along with the warblers and the red-winged blackbirds. It was great to see them all again after so many months apart. The potential for

snow still existed, but there was a lot of melting going on. The warming weather invited the trees to bud. Green was showing up everywhere - except on the slow-pokey catalpa tree.

"I've been worried about the catalpa," Fin chirped to his friend as they studied the bare branches not far from their perch. "The other trees are all starting to get green, but I see nothing happening on her branches. Do you think she died over the winter?"

"Nah! She's just a late bloomer. That's what my folks told me when I asked them the exact same thing," responded Woody, proud of the fact that he knew something that Fin didn't know.

"Well, I sure hope she hurries up. I enjoyed sitting in the shade of her big leaves. I'd hate to think that something had happened to her." Fin recalled one of the sweltering summer days last year, when it was so unbearable as he sat on the wire with the sparrows, that he just had to find some place to cool off. He watched one of the neighborhood girls gather up the catalpa's leaves and use them to trace huge heart shapes all over the sidewalk with her chalk. While she played under the branches of the tree, Fin thought about how cool and comfortable and protected she was from the hot sun. Without hesitation, he had flown down from the wire to find a nice, shady spot high in the tree's crown. Oh, that was a nice memory.

Woody was getting impatient with Fin's reminiscing. He loved to be in motion. He needed to be in motion, especially when he was hungry. The restless woodpecker swooped over to another tree, and his vivid red head started its rhythmic beating. He had been taking a quick break from his fatherly duties to check in with Fin. Several weeks ago, as winter was waning, Woody had met the bird of his dreams, and they'd built a nest

to prepare for their new family. He and Becky took turns keeping the eggs protected until they hatched, which would be any day now. Woody would have to work double-time to find enough food for everyone. He was tired just thinking about it.

He paid little attention as Fin released his grip on the branch, raised his wings, and disappeared into a ray of bright sunshine. Since Woody wasn't going to stick around and tweet with him, Fin went in search of some of their other friends. He was so curious about the adventures of Robin and Blue. Did they get tired as they flew back home from their warm winter vacation spots? How long did it take them to get here? Did the local birds along the way share their trees with the travelers? Was the food any different? Unlike people, Fin and his friends did not need maps or a GPS to know which way to go. Traveling back and forth when the seasons changed was just something they knew how to do. Maker had given all the birds that ability. But Maker also ensured Fin and Woody had everything they needed to stay safe and healthy while remaining in Minnesota year-round.

The one thing Fin really wished right now was that the catalpa tree would start to bud. He didn't want to worry about her, but as far as he could tell, she was way behind schedule. She had a bunch of catching up to do to keep pace with all the other trees in town.

While Fin was flitting around the neighborhood, he happened upon another of his favorites, the very-gated maple. At least that's what he thought Mr. Krueger was calling it. The word is *variegated*. It means something with different colors (Fin found this out from listening more closely when the gardener explained it to one of the kids). Fin wasn't variegated exactly, but he had different colors. He was so proud of his

bright yellow feathers. They stood out clearly against his black forehead and wings and the little patches of white that peeked out around his tail. Maybe that's why he likes this tree so much. They were both so colorful, at least for part of the year.

He loved the leaves on this special maple tree. Each one had a creamy white border surrounding a green center. The contrast made the leaves easy to spot from a long way away. The unusual pattern had something to do with white cells not producing enough "color-fill" (or *chlorophyll*, which is the word that the gardener was actually saying). Mr. Krueger was constantly examining the branches and the leaves. If there was no white on a leaf, he had to cut off the entire stem to keep the rest of the leaves from turning to a solid color. It was a lot of work, and Fin enjoyed watching how tirelessly the gardener took care of this wonderful, beautiful tree.

Fin had a very sentimental attachment to this particular maple. This was where Fin's parents built a nest just last year, and this is where Fin hatched. His mother had laid six eggs, and after they hatched, all of them stayed in the nest for two weeks. It was the best two weeks of Fin's life. His mom and dad took such good care of them all. And when Mom laid some more eggs, they built another nest nearby. His dad was responsible for training and taking care of all the chicks. He was glad that most of his hatch-mates had stayed in town. As if anyone would want to leave the Kruegers' garden, anyway!

THE FATHER SEES

BY MARIANNE MCDONOUGH



Marianne McDonough, a journalist from Edina, Minnesota, loves to study people, history, animals, the intricacies of language, the wonders of the universe, and most of all, the One Who set it all in motion. A two-time cancer survivor, she has authored two books about empowerment in the cancer journey. This short story is her first offering in published fiction.

Marianne believes in the power of prayer, because that's how life works best. She doesn't measure success by projects, money, or position. Instead, she focuses on virtuous character and seeks to convey that fundamental value in her writing. She believes that our omniscient God is the One Whose approval most counts. Excellence in attitude, kindness, and integrity, she says, comprise true success and lasting legacies.

Thus, she hopes "*The Father Sees*" story will encourage readers to seek God's approval above all else and live their lives for His glory.

ONE

6:05 p.m., Wednesday, August 1, 2007

A normal evening commute on a Minneapolis bridge almost took Megan Winfield's life. As she sat in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the Hennepin Avenue Bridge, she heard a loud boom, and the bridge shifted laterally. Then, a few seconds later, a thunderous snap of steel cracked and buckled the bridge, collapsing thousands of pounds of concrete, construction material, cars, and people into the Mississippi River. Her car took an immediate and violent, ten-story dive. Amid a torrent of 111 crashing vehicles, all she could do was grip the wheel and pray.

As soon as her car submerged and the front wheels halted at the bottom, river water surged into her vehicle. Struggling to find an air pocket, she frantically unbuckled her seat belt and pounded on the car windows and roof. Pain and blood seared her hands as the reality of impending death gripped her heart. She thought of her family and hoped they would somehow

know she thought of them. Pleading, she called out to God, “Jesus!”

After that, she couldn’t remember what happened until she sensed her body floating. Unsure if she was alive or dead, a faint groan filled her throat. Opening her eyes, she noticed a construction worker motioning her toward him. “Over here,” he shouted.

“God, help me,” she whispered. Could her body swim despite the intense pain in her knees and hands? The man, soaked in mud, ran to a nearby truck and returned with a broom.

Quivering at the sight of her own blood in the muddy water mixed with bridge debris, she forced herself to propel forward, focusing on the rescuer, who stretched himself flat on a steel beam and extended the broom. When she got near enough to grasp the broom, she heard him praying, “Lord, I know You’re here. You see us.” The man’s face was taut, and compassion seemed to rage out of his watering eyes. “Come on,” he said to her, “You can do it. Just hold on, and I’ll pull you in.”

Megan grasped the broom, but a burning sensation in her hands drew an anguished moan, and she let go. After she caught her breath, she tried again and held on. Her face contorted in pain, but she fought through it.

“Good job. We’re almost there.”

“I’m trying.”

“You’re doing great.”

With one strong, smooth movement and rising to his knees, he pulled her close enough to offer his hand. For the first time since the steel cracked, Megan felt hope. She whispered “thank you” multiple times as he quickly removed her and placed her

drenched and shivering body on a rigid bridge remnant. When she saw her blood running down his arm, Megan sobbed.

“You’ll be all right now,” the man said. “It’s a miracle I even saw you. I thought you were dead until you opened your eyes.”

“So did I, and I still don’t know how I got out of the car.”

“Whatever happened, it’s obvious you fought hard.”

“Yes, I did. I thought of my parents, and I just had to try.”

By that time, the paramedics, who noticed the rescue in progress, had run to Megan’s side. Gently, they checked her vitals, wrapped her hands, caressed her body in blankets, and transferred her to a firm, black gurney. They asked the man if he was all right. He assured them he was; then, touching Megan’s shoulder, he added, “I’ll be praying.”

On the gurney, Megan beheld the panorama of chaos—firefighters launching rescue boats, parents climbing out of mangled cars clutching their children, people stuck in partially submerged cars, and a school bus overturned on its side with swarms of adults trying to help. Indeed, fatalities lay hidden in the smoke and flames. An initial, eerie quiet had given way to sirens and screams. Then, succumbing to shock, the city of Minneapolis, shrouded in dust, went numb.

As the paramedics shifted her into an ambulance, Megan fixed her eyes on the man covered in mud and blood who was kneeling on steel and bowed in prayer, a visual she never forgot.

By the next day, many of her memories waned and refused to be retrieved. Had it not been for the paramedics, who later visited her and related Megan’s trauma to her parents, she would have lost almost all recollection. One of the hardest parts of the ordeal was survivor’s guilt. Why did she make it when

thirteen did not? Why did she recover so well when others among the 145 survivors suffered extensive injuries?

Never had she been so grateful for faith as in the months that followed, despite multiple surgeries, one on her right knee and both hands. God's grace met her through it all. She had to resign from her dream internship at the Walker Art Center, delay her last year of college by one semester, and wait to start graduate school until January 2009. But, cradling an exciting vision for her Master's in Social Work, she was ready to get started.

No matter what lay ahead, God saved her life with the help of a good man, and no one could take that memory from her.

DEVA'S DIVINE DESIGN

BY JANET OLIVER



JANET L. OLIVER'S writing career started early with her groundbreaking work in the field of neurodevelopment. Later her research and writing became interwoven with her love of Christ. Janet's writing often explores the relationship of God's developmental design and His plan for each of us. As a mother of four grown daughters, she has personal and professional experience with the challenges of life in this postmodern age.

In addition to this theme, she also writes historical Christian fiction about the lives of the extraordinary Christian followers through the ages. Janet lives in Chanhassen, west of the Twin Cities, with her husband, tending her garden and working with people of all ages with sensory-motor issues through developmental approaches.

jloliverchauthor.blogspot.com/
www.planforlearning.com



[facebook.com/Storiesforadventurouschristians](https://www.facebook.com/Storiesforadventurouschristians)

ONE

New Year's Eve was a blast! He swam straight over to her, so happy to have finally found her! Definitely a match made in heaven. Yeah, he was vaguely aware of others, but he seemed to know, as she knew, that God had put them together.

When they joined, a whole new season began! Together, they made me complete. God brought into being a unique design of hundreds of characteristics. Me!



Laura awoke and looked over at Rory's tousled black hair and shivered in the cold Minnesota morning. She had definitely had too much to drink last night, but she remembered his gentle, warm touch. She ached so much for that. To finally be seen, she had to take a little risk. She had felt attractive for the first time in her life! She felt, could she even say it? She felt loved.

Laura quickly bound her messy blond hair into a ponytail

BY JANET OLIVER

and looked out into the frozen landscape that was beginning to whiten in the dawning light. Who was she kidding? She got nailed at a one-night stand. No one can fall in love at a New Year's Eve party. She totally fell for that emergency medical technician line of his. Laura felt the shame well up, tightening her chest and pushing hot tears down her cheeks. Silently, she slipped on her boots and pulled her coat over her underwear. She grasped pieces of her clothing she found on the floor and gripped her coat tightly around her bare body. Ready to face the blast of Minnesota's arctic air, she silently slunk out his door. Rory's door.



I settled into the wet, warm, dark, and muffled place. Ah, I could feel the multiplication of the cells after I attached them to the wall. Slowly, I got organized. Within a dozen short weeks, I could touch myself and other stuff around me. I could taste the salty liquid. At times, a glow of light would appear out of the soft darkness. But best of all, as small as I was, I could stretch and flip in the buoyant lightness of my being.

But what is that?

I hear muffled sounds. Sad sounds. I don't know how I know these sounds are sad. But these are hauntingly sad sounds. Up to now, I have been so happy. Now I sense sadness.



Laura sobbed until her body throbbed, thinking, *Just my luck! Just my stinkin' luck.* She had to face it. She hadn't had her period in some time. She looked out at the heaving glacier of ice

in the yard in front of her place. It creaked and cracked like a broken heart.

The March rawness of Minnesota radiated from the panes of window glass in her room. She hadn't been with anyone since that beautiful night with Rory. The memory of that encounter brought all the sensations back to her. How he laced his fingers in hers and gently wiped her hair from her face to kiss her. His warm and loving embrace. She had felt so safe. Now, where was he? Where was she? Alone. As always.

When Laura was six, her heroin-addicted father had realized that heroin was his hero, and he needed no other mistress. He left without a glance backward. Laura's mother tried to keep it together for another few years, but she succumbed to the street life as well. After that, it was a string of foster homes until her emancipation. Laura was determined that she would break this family curse. No drugs. Be careful. Be in control. Don't slip. Trust no one.

But here she was. She added up the details one by one. Feeling fat plus sore breasts equals....pregnant. She had thought the nausea was the flu. What could she do? The best thing to do was face the truth and call Planned Parenthood. Laura reached for her phone. Through her tears, she found the website and pressed the numbers.

WINTER SKY CRASHER

BY DONALD ROOME



DONALD ROOME retired as an RN in 2012 and then worked with his wife as a missionary to Muslims until 2020. He has children and grandchildren scattered throughout the USA. He began writing fiction in 2003, and because he wrote about a Muslim terrorist, he used Jacob S. Wells as a pseudonym to avoid problems while traveling in Muslim countries. His first novel, *Death of a Terrorist* is the story of a young man who becomes a terrorist because of America's corrupting influence on his sister, but he eventually finds salvation through Christ and puts his anger to death on the cross.

Don currently focuses on evangelism through his local church, prayer ministries, and writing fiction and nonfiction. He is currently is blogging about his experiences walking the Camino de Santiago. You can read more about Don, his novel and his other writings at HowGodisheard.com.

ONE

“Ole, wake up! Breakfast is ready,” Mamma’s soft voice beckoned me.

The sun was shining through the frost-caked window. With a bedroom window that faced south in Minnesota in December, that can only mean that it had to be well past the time morning chores should have been done. The whinny of horses and Father’s soothing voice came from the barn. *For sure, Father isn’t letting me sleep late because he is forgetting to take me to the ski jump. Maybe some urgent business requires him to go later and stay longer, so he has to leave me behind. I should be so lucky.* The heat from the stove in the central room in the house had already taken most of the chill out of the bedroom. My brother, Lars, who was eight years younger than me, was already out of bed and out of sight. My sister, Olga, was jabbering with Mamma in the kitchen.

I put on my coat and boots and rushed through the kitchen, so I could get outside to the outhouse to relieve myself.

“Good morning, sleepyhead,” Olga called. “Are you going to greet us or maybe thank us for letting you sleep late?”

“Thanks for letting me sleep late,” I yelled outside the entrance to our home. The snow was almost half a foot deep and the temperature was a little below freezing, perfect weather for skiing. While inside the outhouse, I could hear scraping sounds coming from the barn, from what must have been Lars’ shovel as he mucked the cow and sheep stables. *It sounds like Lars is doing my morning chores.* I shrugged. That wouldn’t help me escape the ski jump.

When I returned inside, Olga handed me a wash basin with water partially warmed from the stove. I grinned at her. “Wow! You are treating me like royalty.”

“Pappa is eager to get to town, so he can have ample time to watch the ski riders,” Olga chatted as she stuck more wood in the stove. “I wish I could go with you and watch the skiers fly through the air with the grace of an eagle, but Pappa said that you were the only one he wanted to go with him.”

Taking a deep breath, I stood still considering the full implications of what that meant. When he was fifteen, a year younger than I was, he was taught by the Hammetvedt brothers for whom the label of *sky crashers* was first coined. The familiar smell of smoldering pine and the kitchen’s warmth failed to ground my mind in today. Father had high hopes for me, and having little I could do about it, I walked to my bedroom in silence and set the basin on the commode. *Sure, Father only wants me with him, so he can coax me into loving the sport of ski jumping.* My heart’s desire was to do anything but ski off a ramp and fly in the air, leaving my stomach somewhere behind. Instead of crashing through the sky, all I could think of was crashing on the ground with my legs and arms

sprawled in opposite directions. After washing, I returned to the kitchen, and Mamma put a partial loaf of dry bread and a dish of milk at my usual place at the dinner table. She left me a nice-sized portion of the loaf. Before reciting the prayer we say before eating, I silently asked God for the grace to survive the ski jumps later today. After thanking the Lord for his provision, I tore a piece off of the loaf, and being in a contemplative mood, I slowly dabbed the piece in the milk, making sure it was thoroughly soaked.

Mamma scowled at me as she stood at the kitchen counter kneading the dough for some bread. “Ole, don’t dawdle. You know how anxious your father is to get to town.”

I nodded and promptly stuffed the sopping piece in my mouth and swallowed. “Then why did he let me sleep late?”

Mamma shrugged and put the dough in a large bowl. “Why don’t you ask him? I imagine he wanted you to be as thrilled about the beginning of the ski season as he was, and he hoped that sleeping late would perk you up... and... perhaps, help you enjoy seeing Red Wing’s return to the glory days when we were called the *sky crashers*.”

That was undoubtedly true. I tore off another piece of bread in silence and soaked it lazily. *Doesn’t Father realize that the thought of ski jumping terrifies me?* Making Father wait because I dawdled, however, didn’t make me feel any better. After breakfast, I found Father standing behind the gate next to our two gray Percheron draft horses, adjusting the harnesses that connected them to the buckboard. He turned to me when I was about ten feet away and smiled. “Did you enjoy the extra sleep?”

I nodded. “Yeah, thanks.” *Don’t expect that to change my attitude about skiing off a ramp.* I climbed up onto the buck-

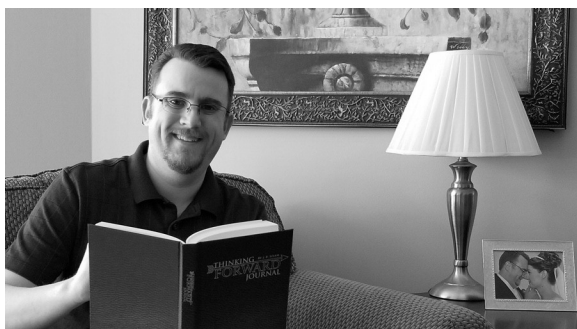
board seat and glanced back at the wagon bed loaded with rough lumber and a blanket covering some bags and what looked like bags and skis. "What's in the bags?"

Father handed me the reins and hopped up next to me. When he had finished settling in, he grabbed the reins back from me. "Underneath are bags of corn for the general store to trade for some supplies, and your mother has some quilts that she made for Mrs. Schmidt." He flicked the reins, and the horses trotted at a pace that reflected the excitement in Father's mood.

I hung on as we bumped over the frozen ruts in the road. *Well, if we get to Red Wing quicker, my time worrying will be shortened and the torture less protracted, but this isn't helping my stomach settle much.* Breakfast felt like it was curdling a little more with each bump, but the crisp air in my face spurred me on and helped keep nausea somewhat at bay.

DIVINE MOMENTS

BY J. B. SISAM



JASON (J. B.) SISAM is a professional blogger, coach, and author. He helps writers and leaders stay motivated with clear thinking so that they are equipped with tools to find their voice, write their God-story, and succeed in their family, business, and life. He creates believable characters that connect with the heart and delivers stories that resonate with truth. Jason lives in Minneapolis with his wife, Kari and their two children, Amelia and Aaron. Learn more at JasonSisam.com.

You can purchase Jason's books at
JBSISAM.COM

FICTION

Divine Providence

King Lyle and the Purple Dragon

Vengeance at Purgatory | Jacob Creek Book 1

Purgatory's Revenge | Jacob Creek Book 2

NON-FICTION

Grace: What's So Amazing About It?

Thinking Forward Journal

Focus Up, In, and Out

ONE

Dust settled against the ground as Jackson Tanner pounded the gravel under his cleats. He swung the bat in a circle and connected its tip to his shoe, and watched as more dust fell off his cleats and landed near home plate. A wave of dizziness swept over his body. Beads of sweat slithered down his forehead, forcing his mind to fog momentarily as he pulled the bat over his shoulder. Jackson readied his mind as he stared down toward the pitcher's mound.

"Hey, batter, batter," the opposing team's pitcher said. "I've got a hot one coming in for ya."

Closing his eyes, Jackson willed himself to stay standing. *What was happening to him?*

"Strike two!" the umpire said.

When did the pitcher release the ball?

Jackson stepped back, shook his head, and allowed the dizziness to subside as the catcher tossed the ball back down to the pitcher.

"Are you ready?" the pitcher said.

The pitcher released the ball as Jackson watched in anticipation. He tightened his grip on the bat; the metal squeaked under his gloves. The ball floated left. No chance to hit, giving him one more opportunity to knock one out of the park for the team.

“Ball three!”

It seemed as if the dizziness passed, and his focus returned. Jackson took a glance at his dad, who nodded in approval. Jackson loved that his dad—a former pitcher for the Minnesota Twins baseball team—was his team’s coach.

“Hey Tanner, your pro-daddy can’t help you get out of this jam.”

Jackson stepped up to the plate, dusted off his cleats, and pulled the bat up once more. The count sat at three balls—two strikes. One more chance to gain a hit and end the tied game. Time to bring his friend, Timmy, who sat on third base, home. The pitcher snarled something then released the ball. It was a doozy of a throw. Straight down the middle. An easy target. He’d hit dozens of these balls. Jackson tightened his grip on the bat, dug his left cleat deep into the gravel, arched his body down and toward the ball. A loud crack as the metal bat sang against the ball’s assault, transferring its kinetic energy against the ball’s leather and sent it deep into right field.

Jackson took off running. He glanced over as Timmy flew toward home. Dizziness collided against his skull. His feet tripped over an invisible stone, and for just a moment, his body flew toward first base before everything went black.



Patrick Tanner watched as Jackson's bat collided with the ball, sending it into right field. One of the best hits his son's ever done. A gust of wind blew the hat off his head as he exited the dugout. Jackson ran toward first base just as Patrick made it behind the umpire. Timmy crossed the home plate.

"Nice score! Way to go," he told Timmy. He looked over at first to see if Jackson made base. A group of players were gathered near first base. As Jackson lay motionless on the ground, inches from being safe, Patrick's heart flew into his throat. In three strides, Patrick was at his son's side.

"Jackson?" He checked for a pulse. Relief washed over him as the tiny pulsing of Jackson's carotid artery met his finger. But something was very wrong. Jackson didn't move.

"Jackson!" he called again. "Wake up, buddy."

Two medics pulled at Patrick's arm. "We've got this."

He moved aside as the medics checked his son's vitals. The boy's eyes were rolled back, and drool snaked its way down his cheek. Patrick's eyes blurred with tears as they hoisted Jackson onto a nearby gurney.

One of the medics came over to speak with Patrick. "He's stable. We're not sure what's going on. Might be dehydration from today's heat. Has he had anything to drink?"

Patrick's mind numbed. "Um... Yeah, I make sure we have enough water and Gatorade for the boys." He rubbed his fingers across his face and down his nose.

"Okay. Just checking. We're taking him to Mercy. We'll do a full evaluation and get some fluids into his body. You can follow us."

Patrick nodded, then pulled out his cell phone. "Joan, something's happened at the game. Meet me at Mercy."

SOPHIE'S SEASON OF
CHANGE

BY BARB WINFIELD



Barb Clobes Winfield has always known she liked writing. As an elementary principal, she had many opportunities to write professionally. It wasn't until retirement that she found the Minnesota Christian Writers Guild (MCWG). Joining MCWG has expanded her skills and broadened her horizons. This led to writing her first fiction. What fun!

Barb has 2 daughters, 6 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren. The newest addition to her life is a rescue cat named Sophie. Many of Sophie's personality traits appear in the fictional piece in this book. Sophie really does put her toy mice in her food dish and say "Hmm" as she thinks and makes decisions throughout her day.

Barb is currently working to finish a non-fiction book on how we (as a nation) are inadvertently teaching our nation's children how to be violent.

**You can reach Barb at
BWinfield@msn.com.**

ONE

SOPHIE MEETS A FRIEND

“Hi, my name is Sophie,” I said to the cute little creature sitting on the floor in front of me. She was gray with pink felt ears and a small rope tail that was also pink. “What’s your name?”

“Skittles,” she replied.

“Just what kind of creature are you?” I asked. I leaned forward to sniff her. She was soft to the touch and made of gentle gray fabric. I could smell the stuffing inside her; it had a bit of a catnip smell. She lay very still, but she could talk.

“I am a mouse. That is what they made me to be. Is that okay?”

“Are you a real mouse?” I asked. “You can talk, so you must be real. I need a real friend to play with. It gets lonely being the only non-human creature around here.”

“I must be real, I can hear you, and I am hungry. Is there anything to eat around here?” Skittles asked.

“I am a cat. I have some dry cat food my human put in a dish right there,” I told her. “Do you want to eat that?”

“That might be okay. I have never had cat food to eat. At least it is food. But Sophie, I can’t walk over there; how will I get there?”

“I can carry you,” I replied. “I can use my mouth to carry you if you don’t mind.”

“That would be great. Just don’t drop me in the water dish. Ahhh, I was worried about your teeth there for a minute. Thanks for the ride.” Skittles sighed as she settled in and took her first bite. “This food tastes really good.”

It was dark outside, and my human was fast asleep in the bedroom. I can see so well in the dark, and night was a time I could check things out in the house at my own pace. Best of all, this was a time to visit and play with my little toy mouse friends. They are the only friends I have. Thankfully, my human brought several little mice home in a package when she came home from a trip to Walmart one day. They have been a great source of fun and frolic. I bat them around with my paws and retrieve them with my mouth. Skittles was a new little mouse, and I had not met her before. Besides that, I noticed the slightest movement when I first looked at Skittles. That was why I said “Hi” to her. I had not met a toy mouse that talked and could see me before this one.

Skittles was chomping away on a piece of dry cat food that had a salmon flavor to it. She took a moment to ask, “What is the name of your human? Have you been with your human since you were a baby kitten?”

“Oh no,” I replied. “Her name is Mommy Bea. She refers to herself as ‘mommy’ when she talks to me, and I hear others call her ‘Bea.’ This is the fourth place I have lived. I like it here. I have not always liked where I lived.”

SOPHIE'S SEASON OF CHANGE

“What do you mean?” asked Skittles.

“Let me tell you about it while you eat; I can sit right here next to the dish and tell you the story if you like.” I moved closer to the dish and sat down where I could see Skittles and be sure she was comfortable as she ate.