

Dear Friend or Family,

Our lives changed forever the day our fifteen-year-old daughter's ski trip with her youth group turned tragic, and she hit a tree so hard that her goggles impaled the right frontal lobe of her brain.

For nearly forty days, we wandered through the dark forest of unknowns. Would she survive the injury and the bilateral craniotomy? Would she open her eyes? Would she recognize us? Would she be able to talk and walk? Would she...?

As we wandered the dark caves of fear and the halls of the hospital, people began to appear. They came with food and drink, items to meet our basic needs, a means of fast and simple communication, communion, and so much more. Those who lived far away sent gifts, messages, and money. And most offered prayers and presence that we know literally saved our daughter's life and our sanity.

God showed up in the flesh—in the sustenance, the connection, and the supply of His people.

Somehow, an army of allies gathered around us and supported us through the most challenging days, months, and years of our lives.

It was such an extraordinary orchestration of support and miracles that I had to write a book to tell the story. But as I wrote the book, I began to realize just how special an occasion this was—to have an entire community show up so powerfully.

I have witnessed enough tragedy in other people's lives before and since to know that, too often, people simply don't know what to do or how to help. But they do wonder: How can I help without adding more pain or burden?

This realization inspired me to pull together a resource for those of you friends and family members who so desperately want to be of support and service, but simply don't know what the individual or family needs because they don't even know what they need.

Being hurled into an abyss of catastrophe is disorienting and painful. Most tragedies require some sort of a temporary Shelter in Place Plan to help navigate all the unknowns and to create a smaller space with minimal disruption which can make it more bearable to navigate the excessive stimulation and out-of-control circumstances of the tragedy.

Here are some ideas/suggestions that were truly life-saving for us organized in a rough timeline.

Knowing that with each individual tragedy, the needs are different and some of these may not be helpful and could perhaps even deepen their pain, I encourage you to use wisdom and discernment in each given circumstance.

May this inspire and guide you as you walk alongside your friend.

*Lisa Boone*

# *The First Week*

## **Prayer**

pray, organize prayer groups, initiate a prayer vigil

Desperately in great need of help, my heart yearned for the prayers of others. It was as if the tragedy itself had shut off the spigot of my own prayers at the valve of my heart. My groanings were so deep, I couldn't reach them to bring them up to the heavens, even though I knew the Spirit within was groaning with me.

When people would ask, "What can we do? What do you need?" our first response was always "Prayer." I can remember Bill's pleading words, "Please pray with everything you have and please believe what you pray. We need real prayers for our girl. Please don't stop praying."

We read every prayer that was sent or written, and they filled our hearts with the knowing that others were with us, interceding with us for Jessie, bridging the isolation and devastation of our landscape.

Her youth group organized a twenty-four-hour prayer vigil for her life, calling all to gather together for the sake of a miracle. They spent hours underneath the stars of heaven, lifting their broken pleading hearts in praise and worship to the God Who Hears. They inked the prayers of their hearts that found

their way on the walls of her tomb. Handwritten lyrics, “Hang on, Jessie,” rose out of the hearts of her friends who had witnessed their sister’s tragic accident, recording the passionate song of pleading prayer with notes of hope.

Our family of faith came together within the walls of our empty home in a prayer rally, boldly tying hundreds of yellow ribbons of hope, attaching their faith and love physically to trees around our home and spiritually crying out to God to bring Jessie home. A video witnessing this great act of love and faith included each person’s personal message to us, spoken from inside our sacred home. Watching this love made flesh poured unspeakable hope and comfort into our broken wings.

Each spoken and whispered prayer lifted and entwined together as a fragrant incense, infiltrating the very throne room of the Creator.

## **Presence**

a few close people

Disorientation and grief coupled with fear demanded self-attention, creating a deep need to be close to her at all times due to her fragile, incapacitated state. To step away from her bedside was difficult and painful. Being 700 miles away from home aided with the boundaries to prevent too many visitors, but that also meant the possibility of no visitors at all. Fortunately, phone calls were made from our home community

of faith and family to churches or acquaintances in Grand Junction, asking them to reach out and help us.

A chosen few showed up for the care of our broken spirits, offering silent presence, prayer, food, and their hands and feet to run errands. This was not a time to visit or give well wishes face-to-face, as it would have taken the possibly short amount of time I had with her away from me. The few quiet helpers provided the tremendous support we needed without overwhelming us with conversations or questions that my heart couldn't navigate.

### **Sustenance**

food and drink

Stripped of the ability to think, or perceive hunger, or leave her bedside, our nourishment for this journey was not within our grasp. Yet food appeared. Our first visitors brought offerings of sandwiches, small pizzas, and simple snacks of crackers and cheese with fruit and bottles of water. The smaller portions seem to make it easier to swallow.

Within a few days, a dear saint from a local church started a daily meal train in the hospital. She just appeared and announced, "I am going to bring you dinner every day," and she did. There were no questions of, "What do you want?" or "What time do you want it?" or even "Do you want it?" She became a living, silent meal train, faithfully showing up at our hospital room twice a day for the entire time we

remained in Grand Junction. For forty days, her daily presence provided more than physical sustenance. She was an unchanging living sustenance that I could see and anchor into.

Simple meals of chicken, soup, sandwiches or salad, along with bottles of water and cookies, were enough to nourish our bodies and strengthen our hearts with the feeling of being cared for. Eventually, the train grew to include breakfast with others coming alongside her mission and massive undertaking to support the traumatized, grieving parents with the provision of daily bread with great love but no words.

## **Technology**

communication to update the outside world

When my daughter-in-law first shared her idea of communicating with our family and community of faith back in Oklahoma, I never could have imagined how crucial this would be. Her assistance in getting the Carepages created and educating me on how to post updates developed an essential link to our supporting community.

God used this young girl to provide us with the beginning of a written structured foundation of our journey, one so multidimensional that so many details could have been lost due to the immensity of her story. God would mightily use this way of communication to help bring light to the darkness and

keep us connected to a growing source of community and support.

The first scripture someone posted in Carepages was Mark 11:24 (NIV), “Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours.” In bold black letters, I staked that first fruit of faith to the wall of her tomb.

Writing entries twice a day, I would communicate with our family and friends in Oklahoma. I knew if they knew what was happening, they would pray. Just a mustard seed of faith, this journal grew into a living, breathing prayer book. It reached beyond the borders of Oklahoma and crossed state lines, even continents.

Thousands of people were reading and posting responses, filling the atmosphere with love, prayers, scriptures, pictures, and hope-filled words. We found our daily bread of strength and hope through each response. There are now thousands of pages recording God’s story of how He would speak His Truth into these horrific circumstances that from all human perspective was absolutely impossible to fix, understand, or overcome.

Carepages is no longer in existence, but Caring Bridge and Facebook are among options to update the larger community, also providing a means for others to share their prayers and well wishes. This pathway seemed to have the greatest impact in reaching the

largest audience in updating and seeking prayer with the least amount of phone calls or texts.

### **Shower and Sleep**

a place of hospitality close to the loved one

We were blessed with the gift of a short stay hospitality inn across the street from the hospital Jessie was in. The short two-minute walk across the street to a hot shower and a clean bed bestowed the opportunity for brief intermissions from the intense drama of our upheaved lives.

Due to the length of our stay in the hospital, we weren't able to remain in the inn, and I could feel the overwhelming stress mounting.

One of our family members stepped in after hearing our lament of having to try and find another place to stay and graciously coordinated a hotel room a few miles away and paid for the days we remained in Grand Junction. This generous provision assured us we would continue to have a quiet place with a hot shower for essential respite.

During that stressful change, a couple from Grand Junction appeared outside of our hospital room and handed us a set of car keys, saying, "We want you to use our extra car for as long as you need it."

### **Essentials**

clean clothes, extra phone charger, sweater, etc.

Being in the anguish of a critically-injured child and away from home, with no readily-available resources,



I wore the same clothes for several days without noticing. It was only when a close friend offered assistance that I realized I needed a few changes of clothes for the long journey ahead. She drove me to a mall close to the hospital and guided my steps and choices, as my vision and decision-making were veiled in grief and fear.

When my son put his phone charger in my hands as he was leaving, I had no idea how invaluable that gift would be. This thoughtful act enabled us to have one in the hospital room and one at the hospitality inn, which removed the “need to remember” when navigating between the two places.

Sitting in the cold dark ICU room was numbing all the way down to my toes. I couldn’t get warm, even with the blue-striped white waffle cotton blanket wrapped around me. The extra layer of a sweater that was gifted anonymously was a wrap of warmth that provided continuous comfort.

### **Personal Hygiene Items**

When the phone call came about Jessie’s accident, the only priority in my heart was getting to her as quickly as possible. Desperation thwarted any thoughtful preparations for a long stay away. Small travel-sized toiletries and personal care items, including toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo and soap, chapstick, and lotion dropped off at the hospital with a note and no expectation to visit were most helpful in the early days after her accident.

I remember my daughter-in-law leaving me her hairbrush with the words “I love you” written in white fingernail polish on the handle. That simple act of sharing, not only the brush but her roughly-etched love on the handle, spoke daily of her presence and prayers with me after her return to Oklahoma.

## **Home Care**

pets and plant care

Abruptly leaving our home also meant leaving our pets and indoor plants without care or provision. The attentiveness of our neighbor across the street ensured our cat was never without food and water. She also stepped in to care for our plants and mail without us even asking.

Bill’s mom retrieved Toasty, our chihuahua, and took her home for several months, which helped to relieve one of our burdensome heart concerns.

The care of beloved pets is often one of the most helpful offerings during this time of great unknown chaos and grief, as their routines are also disrupted. They need a loving safe home, rather than a kennel if possible.

# *The Second Week*

## **More Prayer**

### Cash

Small amounts of cash began to show up in the mail and be dropped off by strangers. These simple acts of love were such a powerful, tangible way for someone to say, “I am thinking of you and your needs.”

Offering to buy a cup of coffee or a soda from a close vending machine, or maybe even make a quick trip to the hospital cafeteria is a gift of hospitality shared without encroaching upon the holy space of raw and brutal grief.

The laundromat attached to the hospitality inn was an oasis of grace, welcoming pilgrims of pain and loss to bring their soiled battle uniforms for renewal. The small bills gifted to us were easily exchanged for quarters to feed the cleaning machines that would churn and beat out the day’s accumulations of blood, vomit, sweat, and tears.

## **Gift Cards**

A friend’s coordination of donations of gift cards to restaurants close by and meal delivery services like Grubhub, Doordash, or Postmates provided freedom

to order what we wanted and needed when we could think about it.

When we began receiving gift cards in the mail, the flow of love and care was like a warm shower. I couldn't have imagined how life saving gift cards for food felt. It was beyond the physical. The care and hope became flesh, knowing behind the plastic colored cards with a balance was the body of Christ feeding and caring for us.

### **Care Packages**

Journals, pens, stamps, thank you cards, inspirational books, cards, notes with hope-filled prayers and words, small blankets, soft warm socks, stuffed animals, and playlists of inspirational music began flowing into our broken emptiness of grief so far away from home. Each offering would submerge us in the supportive love from the community, bringing the ancient words of St. Patrick to life, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me."

### **Snack Baskets**

fruit, muffins, chocolate, favorite drinks, and healthy snacks

Nourishment within these baskets were the sweet and salty moments of the day, bearing comfort and ease within the challenging intervals of complications and unknowns. So much of our days were shared with her

nurses or techs whose days were also challenging, many times with no lunch break. Being able to offer nourishment to others who were helping us brought tiny moments of joy as the gifts gave us opportunities to express our gratitude in more tangible ways.

### **Flowers and Faith**

"small" arrangements of flowers or gifts of faith

The first flower ushered in a comforting scent from home. In the midst of the dark barrenness of life were hued petal reminders of the beauty and fragrance of the compassion and care outside the hospital. The soft bouquets were bringing a stark contrast to the harsh reality of tragedy, soothing my heart with love and companionship of others. They were sharing in our pain and bringing beauty and hope.

The arrival of a silver cross with opal filigree became a stone of faith with the words etched in the bottom, "The Boone Family, Jeremiah 29:11" I held the beautiful ornate cross as it held me with that ancient promise that was being called upon by our friends who had sent it, "For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope." The cross was our faithful companion, accompanying us through every day of hospitalization and rehabilitation.

Over Easter, the thoughtful gifts of Easter baskets stirred my soul with the tender memories of all the

baskets of her past. From a family back home came a beautiful silver metal basket with the letter “J” in pearls hanging from the handle, the inside brimming with plastic eggs filled with candy and scriptures of healing and love. Seeing her initial in such beauty, I was overwhelmed with the great love being given by the one who saw the deep hurt of a momma not being able to create a basket for the first time in her daughter’s life.

### **Meal Train**

coordinate a simple meal train

Having people drop off food without contact was the key to not being pulled away from her bedside. Food in disposable containers was preferred, making it simple and convenient to dispose of. Small portions of food, not heavy or spicy, were the easiest on the already-distressed gastric systems.

The coordinated meal train in the ICU was beyond anything I had ever experienced. The continued generous acts of “strangers” was overwhelming. Who were these people showing up evening after evening with a meal for us? The food not only provided nourishment, but this ministry of care reached down and lifted us up with the gentle grace of love and provision.

## **Indispensable Resources and Guidance**

help with insurance information or research of TBI or whatever trauma the loved one has suffered, rehabilitation hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, etc.

Incapacitated in thought and capacity to find information on my own, I was grateful when standing stonehenges began to appear unsolicited, offering resources and information. My first packet of materials arrived in a large manilla envelope from an experienced neurological certified nurse in Indiana named Becky. My hands gripped printed information regarding brain injuries specific to what Jessie had suffered and details crucially beneficial to the complicated conferences and daily round conversations/questions we had with the medical staff.

Becky became a powerful advocate and resource to our family, providing whatever information or help we needed regarding brain injuries. We invited her to Oklahoma to meet Jessie and stay with us for a few days after we returned home. She brought her expert opinions on specific rehab techniques in her recovery and became one of our lifelong friends and remains one of Jessie's biggest supporters.

My nursing director's involvement with all of the communication to our insurance company and coordination of information between the facilities was profoundly valuable while I was struggling to accomplish some of the simplest tasks. Her attention

to detail assured all parties had the information required to assure the best possible coverage we could have. She was a key player with other Integriss personnel who coordinated the medical air transport that would fly Jessie home.

When Jessie was stable enough for long-distance transport and the social worker initiated the conversation about discharge planning to a facility in Oklahoma City, I was silent. As much as I wanted her transported home, my mind was paralyzed within her current reality of prognosis. When she requested a list of my preferred rehab facilities in Oklahoma, I reached out to a couple of good friends who were experienced rehab professionals. Within twenty-four hours, I had a list. Receiving an unexpected phone call from a friend sharing crucial information about Soonercare took us by surprise. After learning about the criteria required for acceptance and the additional benefits that could be available in addition to our private insurance, we knew we would need all the help we could get for her. She guided us through the process and paperwork, ensuring additional support for Jessie's future healthcare needs.

This gift of timely acceptance into the Soonercare program opened an unexpected door of a private duty nurse based on her severity of need after returning home with no lapses of care. The support of the community within their realms of experience and knowledge dispersed some of our heavy burden,



leveling some of the “unexpected potholes” that could have swallowed us up without it.

### **Laundry Love**

After we returned to Oklahoma, my mother-in-law would show up with a basket and insist we give her all of our “dirties.” The love and attention given to the part of our smelly lives crammed in a white plastic trash bag, hidden away from the daily movements, was another way of breathing oxygen into the box we existed in. The fragrance would soften my spirit as I organized the clean clothes on the shelf in the bathroom, envisioning the gift of her hands and heart reviving and refreshing not only our dirty clothes but our grief-stained spirits. Each time I caught the fresh fragrance of her offering, my heart immediately thought of her silent hidden grief as a grandma and how she was tending to us while we were tending to her only granddaughter.

### **Sitting**

Unwilling to leave her bedside due to her fragile state of no skull, no movement, no communication, unpredictable vomiting, and possibility of death with the risk of seizures, it took a few weeks for me to be willing to leave while someone stayed with her for a short amount of time. But as soon as I relented, this offering of sitting with another would create small spaces for self-care, rest, or simply a break.

One of her neuro ICU nurses was the first person to graciously offer to come in on her day off to sit with Jessie so we could attend a church service. Her expertise and knowledge of Jessie's condition provided the absolute perfect "sitter" for my heart with regards to her safety.

### **Financial Support**

Days turned into weeks and then into months. Being out of state with both of us unable to work changed the landscape of our financial picture. We had some cushion but were not prepared for this lengthy catastrophe.

Bundles of deep love disguised as mail appeared regularly. In the midst of the written compassion and mercy of what we were suffering, the prayers and scriptures pleading for strength and hope, and the powerful love of others crossing time and space, money would find its way to us. Small bills, large bills, and handwritten checks out of the accounts of friends and strangers, all helping to bridge our chasm created by lack of work.

Anonymous larger funds were also provided, paying our mortgage for six months until we could get steady enough to find our way back to work.

Her track coach organized a fundraiser, "The Jessie Boone Miracle Run," with the intention of gathering community to unite hearts for a miracle for Jessie but also to provide the financial support in hopes her miracle would emerge.

Her gymnastic family coordinated a “Save Your Soda Pop Tab” campaign, which raised a generous amount of money. For many months, the gymnasts collected soft drink tabs made of aluminum to be sold as scrap metal for fifty cents a pound. When I received a call from the coach of her gymnastic team about the fundraiser’s money that was coming our way, I couldn’t help but think about those gymnasts who spend three to four hours a day after school at the gym, most of them rarely drinking a soda pop, and the amount of time and energy it would take to gather thousands of pop tabs. What a remarkable display of love in action from a remarkable group of athletes whose hearts are trained and disciplined to support their teammate in all kinds of “events.”

Our Sunday School class was a constant support in their presence through prayers, meals, and notes. One day, I received a call informing us of the “diaper drive” they were having in Jessie’s honor. They knew she was in diapers and needed changes several times a day. We received dozens and dozens of packages of adult small diapers. This generous act of love not only helped us with her toiletry needs, but it was a constant reminder with each diaper change that we were being held in love by others who weren’t able to be physically present.

It felt like each person was investing the fruit of their labor in the hope of our daughter’s future, bringing deep comfort and bubbling hope to the surface of the dark relenting night.

## **Hospital Gowns**

woven fabrics of comfort

Something unexpectedly beautiful happened in the hospital when my neighbor, Anne, went in search of small nightgowns of many colors and designs. She cut each one up the back, sewed the hems, placed colorful ribbon ties on the backs, and brought them to us as such a gentle offering of great kindness. After one of Jessie's warm bed baths with lotion massage, I adorned her with a freshly washed, downy soft, pink with a tiny white flower drape. It was as if I had dressed her in an evening gown. Her beauty radiated within the fabric of this generous love. I was astonished at the comfort I felt. She had been in a "hospital gown" since the accident and now her image shifted within me, from a sick frail daughter to a beautiful treasure who was slowly being remade. She never wore another ordinary hospital gown. Who knew something as simple as a nightgown would be such powerful medicine for my heart.

# *The Third Week*

## **More Prayer**

Keep the Meal Train Moving

Upon returning to Oklahoma, the meal train of meals continued in the acute rehab. Our local loving community of friends brought many additional offerings of breakfast, muffins, yogurt, smoothies, baskets of fruits, nuts and snacks. The mountainous abundance of generosity not only nourished our bodies but our impoverished hearts, leveling out some of the deepest valleys of isolation and grief as we navigated this wilderness of intense suffering.

One of the most helpful parts of the meal train was the gift of the food being left at the door with no greeting. It could have been misconstrued as rudeness or even as a lack of gratitude, but grief had depleted the social aspect of my spirit. The protection of the tomb we were within helped to shield some of the painful reality of the severity of her brain injury. A large part of emotional survival required remaining secluded with only a few close friends and family to minimize comparisons of others' lives, especially with their children's activities. Even the once-exciting arrival of the grailed graduation announcement of a young person we loved now magnified the reality of what would not be occurring in our household as we

remained in the dire throes of fighting for her life and recovery.

### **Lawn and Garden Care**

Our time away from home occurred in early spring, bending into the summer months, which meant the growing season was in full force for the life we had left behind. A generous, grace-filled young girl in our neighborhood kept our yard mowed, making it appear as if we had never left. Receiving help from a girl the same age as Jessie transcribed into a strange space of innocent hope. Could there be a deeper meaning within her youthful offering? Were her imprints upon our yard reflecting the imprints upon God's heart, placed by her offerings of prayers with the hope of miraculous healing? Her imprints upon my heart continued as she also brought handwritten notes of love and encouragement from her classmates.

“We are going to spray your yard for weeds this week. We just wanted you to know,” came the message through Carepages. “What color mulch do you want? We are going to do some flower bed work and freshen up your beds.” Bill and I looked at each other in disbelief with the extent to which others were widening their own life tasks to include ours. The intentional acts of kindness, all in the name of keeping our lives moving forward without us, was overwhelming but also deepened the awareness of the presence of others on our wilderness path.

## **Monthly Bills**

Finding a way to help in these areas without asking is challenging due to confidentiality and the need for account numbers. A close family member or trusted family friend is a good choice to take over keeping up with the monthly due dates.

Sending money earmarked for monthly expenses is an easy way to share your intention of seeing the difficult circumstances and providing support to relieve some of the burden for as long as possible.

## **Blood Drive Coordination**

Blood drives were coordinated in honor of Jessie Boone by her gymnastic family. During her hospital stay, I witnessed her receiving numerous life-saving infusions of blood products.

Even though she didn't receive the actual blood donated by others, she received the highest honor of love and support from others who donated in her name for the good of others. The letter we received clearly outlined the donations they had received in Jessie's honor and expressed deep gratitude to be the recipient of such love.

## **Wheelchair Ramp**

Bringing her home in a wheelchair as a mute, spastic quadriplegic was a bittersweet moment. But when we encountered the ramp our neighbor had readied for our arrival, allowing for the smooth transition into

our home, preventing the jolting bumps and tilts that brought forth eruptions of vomit, it seemed to lessen some of the bitter. Our gratitude for the intentional care and support through the skilled hands of our neighbor overshadowed that moment of pain.

### **House Cleaning Service**

A few days before we were discharged home, a few close friends devised a secret gift. Experiencing that moment of stepping into the resurrected sanctuary of our home with the fibers of the carpet standing at attention, particles of dust nowhere to be found, and the absence of the dreaded toilet ring from non-flushing created a beautiful homecoming. No evidence remained to witness the four months of an empty, abandoned house. It was like we had never been gone.

Dreading the first encounter with the refrigerator, knowing what had been left unattended behind the closed doors of our life, imagining the stench of the neglect, I was surprised instead and shifted to yet another moment of profound gratitude when met with a bright light showing the fresh array of staples needed for our daily life.

### **Fill a Freezer**

Upon arrival home, we were overwhelmed with the intensity of her care and the time and energy it took to get her medical equipment, medications, and daily



routines in order. When and how would we grocery shop and prepare food? We were astounded when we discovered several ready-made meals tucked away in the freezer. The availability of these labeled meals with a name and a blessing note made mealtime doable and sacred. Each meal we thawed and warmed was a moment of nutrition and communion with those who provided it.

### **Organizational Skills**

With her intensive medical care needs also came the need for a plethora of medical equipment and supplies. Overwhelmed with her continuous care, I was burdened with the daunting task of trying to organize all of her supplies, especially when we made the decision to move her into our bedroom.

A friend who has the gift of organization began showing up one day a week, offering her help wherever I needed support. It wasn't long before she was bringing baskets and organizers and had Jessie's entire entourage of supplies and equipment, including her personal items, all in perfect order. This type of organization had a major power to cross over into my personal space, bringing peace and order to my soul in the midst of the overwhelming mountain of stuff she required within each day.

# *The Fourth Week and Beyond*

## **More Prayer**

A powerful gift was offered through the uncountable number of times a circle of close prayer warriors would gather outside our room in the prayer gardens or in the chapel of the hospital where we were being cared for. Gathering once a week for a couple hours nearby, their intercessory prayers poured strength and hope into my withered spirit, awakening and speaking life over Jessie. Week after week, month after month, their faithful presence in gathering for prayer was a precious lifeline that I clung to, being unable to join them in a physical presence.

## **Presence and Porch Love**

Offering your time to be used in any way needed means the world. One friend offered one day of her week to me, to do whatever I needed her to do. Every week looked different and grew into a time of great emotional care for me. In addition to meals, she brought joy and laughter each time she came. She spent her time organizing, running errands, staying

with Jessie so I could get away, or reading to Jessie and being a strong presence of support in the midst of my brokenness. Her courage and willingness to be “in the tough” with me carried me through many of the hardest days at home. Respite for the caregiver is essential for providing spaces of rest, spaces to breathe, or spaces to simply get time away for some much needed attention to personal needs.

“Porch love” was the name I placed on the act of bringing a greeting of love and support when dropping off a handwritten note, a simple gift with a message of faith or hope, favorite foods or drinks, or any other gift with the potential to lift the sagging spirit of sadness.

Many days, I would encounter treasures left on my porch anonymously. These surprises of love were a delight to my heavy heart, shifting the rhythm of my day by adding light and love within the painful movements, reminding me of the beauty surrounding our lives.

One morning, I discovered a homemade pie just sitting on my porch with no note. It was filled to the brim with the sweetness of a friendship and left me wondering whose heart was pouring out to us that day. Within the first bite, I tasted the mystical gift of healing, reminding me of the goodness in the world and how it was being so freely shared with us. I never knew who made the pie or drove the long distance to our home, but I did fully receive the love that was

being offered through their gift of grace. It's one I have never forgotten.

Extravagant grace came one day with the one who delivered groceries to my front door. Meats, fruits, vegetables, breads, including miscellaneous frozen foods were in the boxes she was emptying into my refrigerator and freezer. She said, "I went on my 'Sam's run' today and it was impressed upon me to deliver my list for our house to your house." Her smile was as contagious as her generosity.

"Who does this?" was my immediate response to her.

"Oh, you know! I guess the Holy Spirit wanted you to have my groceries, so here I am!"

We laughed at the beauty of His provision and the willingness of her spirit to obey the promptings upon her. This moment carried me through the week as I marveled again at the abundance of His intimate caring and attention to detail.

Tragedies requiring long recoveries will require extensive long-term support in multiple areas for the family and may make it hard for them to continue to ask for help. Continuing to show up in whatever way you can, and offering your services or resources for as long as they need, will help to ensure that the family will not only survive but have a much better chance of recovery as they begin to reenter the world they were violently ripped away from.

## **Make a Pilgrimage**

Several months before her accident, Bill and I had traveled to the Holy Lands to experience the sacred lands and places where Jesus lived and walked. In my backpack, I carried a scrolled prayer for a dear friend's son with cancer, readied for the holy moment when we visited the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem to tuck it into the crevice of God's heart with bold expectations of his miraculous healing.

After leaving the scroll in God's heart, we traveled to the Valley of Elah where David had bravely stood up to the Philistine giant, Goliath. With a smooth stone, a slingshot, and his unshakeable faith in God, he knocked that giant to the ground, removing his head and the threat to God's people.

While standing in this famous victory site with two other powerful prayer warriors, I reached down and picked up a smooth stone from the valley and spoke loudly, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" With a picture of us three holding that stone along with our unshakeable faith in God, we gifted that smooth stone to our friend who was in the hospital fighting for her son's very life.

Little did I know that I would be gifted back that very photo, the same smooth stone, with the same unshakeable faith of my prayer warrior sisters, believing this giant would be knocked to the ground, his head removed, to no longer be a threat to us.

Just a few weeks later, I unexpectedly received a note from a brother in Christ who had taken his own pilgrimage to the Holy Lands, with a scroll in his backpack, readied for his holy moment at the Wailing Wall. He sent a picture of him placing Jessie Boone's life into the crevice of God's heart, believing with bold expectations of her miraculous healing.

### **Share Dreams**

Jessie's fifth grade Sunday School teacher wrote me an email one night a few weeks after her accident:

*Lisa, our hearts have been stricken with grief since Jessie's accident. We have been praying for her to be rescued and restored as you traverse valley to valley, the peaks being so distant from one to the next. This watershed event we know none of us will ever be the same. We have all been deeply reminded of our own fragility and profound need for God to hold and protect us.*

*I want to share a "vision dream" I had last night. I have been blessed to have several over the years and each one has brought me awakenings to God and to God's creation. In this dream, I found myself lying in a hospital bed. Picture if you will, the old fashioned beds on a hospital floor like you might see in the 1800's. I wasn't quite sure of my ailment, but I knew it was very serious and I was very frightened. I felt so alone and afraid of what was to come. Within moments a nurse brought two people to my*

*bedside. When I looked up, it was Jessie and you, Lisa. Instantly my fears began to melt away.*

*As I gazed at Jessie, all the while humbled that she had come to comfort me, it was if I had gotten to get a glimpse of the sacred transfiguration we will all experience as we move closer and closer toward God. In that moment, despite knowing I was in a dream state, I knew I was truly experiencing the presence of God.*

*We all said hello and then Jessie looked at me, with her God-gleaming smile, and said, “I do not remember you but I am told you were my Sunday School teacher when I was younger. When I first saw you just now, I knew right then that we had known each other before. God and I are so close to each other that it is just like you and I talking here, right now. God says you are going to be fine and there’s no reason to fear. I know this is true because God has been with me in every step of my life.”*

Our care chaplain, Tim Travers, was one who earnestly prayed for Jessie and once shared with me that he believed fervent prayer continued even as we slept. He shared his dream was one of her smiling as she got help from friends for the “finishing touches” of getting all prepared to celebrate prom. He didn’t remember what she said, but he was struck by the fact she was speaking in full sentences, which at the time seemed such an amazing miracle to hope for. He felt deep within his heart that it wasn’t only the wish he had for Jessie, but it was a forecast of things to come.

He shared with me, “I hesitate to share this dream for I fear it might sound presumptuous in some way. However, as with other times in my life when the Lord has given me glimpses into the amazing miracles that have yet to be, I decided to remove my own self-consciousness about it and just share it in the context of Christian love and encouragement.”

A few months after her accident, Ivy, a close friend who has prophetic dreams, was brave enough to tell me about a dream she had about Jessie:

*In the dream, my husband, Steve and I were walking into church. We encountered Bill, Lisa, and Jessie, who was laying on a small gurney. We stopped to talk to Jessie, and her face was full of joy. We told her how wonderful it was to see her and she said, “The next time you see me, I’m going to be walking into church.”*

### **Witness Boldly**

Emotional exhaustion left me no reserves for any additional expenditures of energy. I hoped this Sabbath would replenish enough of the empty cells within my body to make it through the day. When the nurse came to our door with the announcement that we had a visitor, neither one of us moved.

“Someone named Kirk is here to see Jessie,” she said as she searched our immobility for direction. Not knowing who it was made it harder to respond.



Mustering empty movement, I found my way to the lobby, feeling the sting of tears, as the outside continued to push in.

*Why can't people just leave us alone?*

"Hello, I am Lisa, Jessie's mom."

"Yes, do you remember me?" He reached out his hand. "I am Kirk, one of Jessie's night nurses in the PICU." I took his warm hand into mine, thinking how this tall, lean young man looked so much different out of his scrubs.

"Well, I do now. Hello, Kirk." I stepped toward him for a hug. "My goodness, what brings you here?" Embracing him brought the pangs of regret of what I had been thinking.

*What is wrong with me? This kind soul has taken the time to come all the way here to see Jessie.*

"How is Jessie doing?" His heartfelt concern shifted my inertia. As we walked toward her room, he shared how he had been prompted powerfully to come and see her. "I was sitting in church today listening to the sermon about the suffering of others, and all I could think about was your family. He told us we don't know why suffering happens but what we do know is that in suffering, we learn perseverance. Through perseverance, we learn character. And through character, we learn hope. And through it all, we can also learn how truly dependent we are on God for everything. This felt impression was placed heavy upon my heart to pray for her. Would it be okay if I prayed over her?"

My heart melted as I rested in the familiarity of his words while receiving comfort from his great acts of witness and love. I watched his face as he studied hers, his eyes deeply gentle as he spoke words of healing and hope over her quiet presence.

He felt compelled to tell us that because of Jessie's journey, his heart had been reignited for Christ and he wanted to thank her. His compassionate heart captured us and brought a much-needed intermission of relief to our overextended hearts.

God had sent an unexpected angel to us that day in the form of a young man named Kirk, bringing to mind Hebrews 13:2 (NLT), "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it."

### **Balloon Blessings**

My aching heart was tendered to tears as I read this entry from one of Jessie's Carepages followers:

*I wanted to let you know about something very special my five-year-old son, Blair, did yesterday for sweet Jessie Boone. We were at a grocery store that was giving each child who came through the door a balloon. Blair made it all the way through the store without letting go, and I said, "Blair I'm so proud of you for hanging on to your balloon tight. What a big boy you are now that you're five." (This is actually a big deal because Blair always manages to let go within seconds, and then comes lots of tears!)*

*Anyway, he said to me, "You know why, Mama?"  
I said, "No, why?"*

*He said, "Cause I'm gonna send this balloon to  
Jesus with a special prayer for Jessie Boone." It took  
my breath away.*

*When we got to the car he said, "Will you write,  
'Dear Jesus, please make Jessie Boone all better.  
Love, Blair?'" I pulled out a marker from my purse,  
wrote his prayer on the balloon, and we set it free.  
We watched it go, and go, and go, until the green  
balloon disappeared into the blue sky. Blair had a  
huge smile on his face, and said, "Okay, Mama, we  
can go now." It was so touching. I had tears in my  
eyes for an hour, and prayed for Jessie all afternoon.  
May God bless you and keep you. Amen and amen.*

This beautiful child was offering to God what he had been given. His little balloon blessing became Jessie's blessing.

## **Lemonade Stands**

Ashley's loving faith was put into action even after we had left Grand Junction. We received a letter while in rehab telling us about her selling lemonade for three days. She had enclosed a picture of her in front of this simple lemonade stand, wearing a Jessie Boone "Expect a Miracle" t-shirt her mom had made. On the back of the picture was her handwriting, "I believe." Inside the envelope, she had neatly tucked her faith offering of the thirty one-dollar bills she had earned

in belief of Jessie's healing. Touching each dollar bill merged the divine within her tiny heart and expanded my collapsed heart, leaving me gently warmed.

### **Cards of Encouragement**

Receiving encouraging words daily lifted our hearts. The following list was sent to me one night through the Carepages, and these supportive scriptures were present and ready at any given moment to offer hope and support when most needed.

You say: "It's impossible" and God says: "All things are possible" (Luke 18:27)

You say: "I'm too tired" and God says: "I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28-30)

You say: "Nobody really loves me" and God says: "I love you" (John 3:16 & John 3:34)

You say: "I can't go on" and God says: "My grace is sufficient" (II Corinthians 12:9)

You say: "I can't figure things out" and God says: "I will direct your steps" (Proverbs 3:5-6)

You say: "I can't do it" and God says: "You can do all things" (Philippians 4:13)

You say: "I'm not able" and God says: "I am able" (II Corinthians 9:8)

You say: "It's not worth it" and God says: "It will be worth it" (Roman 8:28)

You say: “I can’t forgive myself” and God says: “I forgive you” (I John 1:9 & Romans 8:1)

You say: “I can’t manage” and God says: “I will supply all your needs” (Philippians 4:19)

You say: “I’m afraid” and God says: “I have not given you a spirit of fear” (II Timothy 1:7)

You say: “I’m worried and frustrated” God says: “Cast all your cares on Me” (I Peter 5:7)

You say: “I’m not smart enough” and God says: “I give you wisdom” (I Corinthians 1:30)

You say: “I feel all alone” and God says: “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5)

### **Mountain Climb**

Jessie climbed a mountain called Mt. Garfield in Colorado with a holy man of prayer and great faith. At the base, he signed Jessie’s name in the registry book and carried her heart, strength, and joy with him all the way. He had climbed it before, and it had never been easy for him. With a chosen rock of faith heavy in his backpack, a symbol of Jessie’s strength that was more of a gift than a burden, he dared to believe one day she too would climb a mountain. The first 1,000 yards is very steep and has turned away many discouraged and weary hikers, but he was determined he would not stop or give up. With the help of a young lady whose spirit has brightened

the path and lightened the load, he took her on each step upward following the strenuous narrow path to the top. Every breath, every pain, he bore for her healing. Upon reaching the peak, he celebrated their victory by recording this momentous act of faith with a breathtaking picture of himself. What a powerful parable to Jessie's climb back.

He mailed Jessie a package, including the rock and the treasured photo and a card. On the front of this card was the expansive ocean filled with massive waves declaring, "No ocean can hold it back, no river can overtake it, no whirlwind can go faster, no army can defeat it, no law can stop it, no distance can slow it, no disease can cripple it, no force on earth is more powerful or effective than the POWER OF PRAYER!"

Then his own words of blessing, "Jessie, it is truly a blessing and a privilege to bow before the Father on your behalf, for it is through Him that love and healing finds its source and we find ourselves in His presence because of you."

Those words, "we find ourselves in His presence because of you," brought sacred tears of joy, seeing the beautiful vision of Jessie's great need for prayer as a gift of placing others in His presence. My heart held this portrait of holy exchange for all who bowed before the Father with their intercessory prayers for others.

So many had asked us what they could do for us, and our consistent answer was to please pray, as we fully believed in the power of prayer. Prayer was our most powerful weapon in generating love toward the

healing of our daughter. And now we were reminded that this powerful weapon of love also enfolded others within His presence.

### **Love Infusions**

Infusions of love were continually finding their way to us like the following words from my spiritual mother, Bobbie, giving witness to the power of love reflected in others.

*Thank you for rousing to speak your heart to me. I expect nothing from you because I know even a trickle of words about life outside the tomb seems too much to bear, and you'd prefer to curl up in silence. Yet all of us who love you will continue to speak life to you because we know it is essential nourishment that you must continue to receive, whether you want it right now or not. Jess is unable to take nourishment for herself right now, yet you and the team of medical caregivers sustain her with Ivs and tummy pegs until she is healed enough to nourish herself. We are similarly infusing you with our lives in the hope that somehow, if only unconsciously, you will receive our breath and blood.*

*Think of us like the angel that God sent to Elijah, when he curled up under a solitary broom tree in the wilderness. Elijah had just conquered the prophets of Baal and had faithfully glorified God through mighty feats of witness and revelation. But instead of feeling more confidence, strength, and an assurance of his identity as God's beloved one, he was bereft,*

*emptied, hopeless. He seemed to only identify with his brokenness. “He asked that he might die: ‘It is enough; now O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors.’” (1 Kings 19:4-5). Then he curled up and went to sleep, as if to await the death he thought that he wanted. But an angel of the Lord appeared and told him to eat and drink. He did, but then he lay down again. The angel persisted, “Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.’ He got up, ate and drank; then he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God” (19:7-8).*

*I know that you and Bill are grieving beyond imagining. Your suffering magnifies Jess’s wounds and that brokenness, rather than your eternal giftedness as God’s beloved, seems wholly who you are. But you must get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.*

Veins of this type of life-infused love abundantly flowed in the deep crevices of our lives, nourishing and sustaining us for this uncharted journey of the unknown.

### **Make A Dream Come True**

Jessie’s small group came together wanting to give her the gift of the prom she never had the opportunity to attend. The dream scenario came true for Jessie when her friends recreated a prom night for her. This gift revealed a deep awareness and sensitivity of loss



and the love to rewrite her story in a way only they could. Moments like these are life-giving to those who have lost so much of their own life.

*“There is no greater love than to lay  
down one’s life for his friends.”*

~John 15:13 (NLT)~

These shared lived experiences of great love are just a few examples of the countless ways others laid their lives down for us.

The offerings and sacrifices of others containing this love becomes a living substance that quietly and mysteriously infuses one facing tragedy with healing medicine—a medicine that is divinely prescribed to contain the unique ingredients needed for each moment.

May you find your own unique ways to share great love with the true intention to shine a light of hope and support in the dark forest in which your friend walks.