



Chapter Six *Under the Shadow*

As I enter the new year of 2016, I am very aware that my sister and I are on a climb to Heaven's Gates. The Shadow of Death is palpable. Only one of us will be allowed to enter into that most Holy Place of God when we reach our destination together. My husband's youngest brother, was the first of our siblings to transition into eternal life on January 3, 2016. The day before our departure for New Jersey to attend the funeral, I am in the Prayer Room reading Exodus 24. God has called Moses to the top of the mountain for a private meeting under a dense cloud cover. The Lord gave specific instructions that Moses alone is to approach the Lord; the others must not come near (Exodus 24:2). But Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel were allowed to accompany Moses part of the way up the mountain (a few of us will be allowed to accompany Gwynn, at least, part of the way up the mountain of illness she is climbing to see God).

Exodus 24: 9-10 comments that they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet were something like pavement made of lapis lazuli as bright as the blue sky.....and they ate and drank (I have not physically seen God in my 67 years of life on earth, to date, however, at my request, He gave me a physical manifestation as proof of His Presence with Gwynn and I in our spiritual journey through cancer and the Shadow of Death.... I will share details about that experience later in this chapter).

Quoting my blog entitled: Be the Miracle

That same day as I was reading the scripture references that were part of my devotional materials, I meant to highlight Psalm 40:4, but was somewhat absentminded thinking about my sister's situation and highlighted Psalm 39:4 instead. Listen to what it says.....Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. The forty days would be up February 13, 2016. I really believed I was counting down the days until my sister's death.

Exodus 24: 12-18

12 The Lord said to Moses, "Come up to me on the mountain and stay here, and I will give you the tablets of stone with the law and commandments I have written for their instruction."13 Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. 14 He said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them."15 When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, 16 and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. 17 To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. 18 Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

In my symbology, Gwynn is Moses and I am her aide, Joshua. God initiated a 40 day countdown beginning January 4.....to what, I wasn't sure.....but I wondered that when I reached day 40 would my own sibling, Gwynn be transitioning?

January 5, 2016

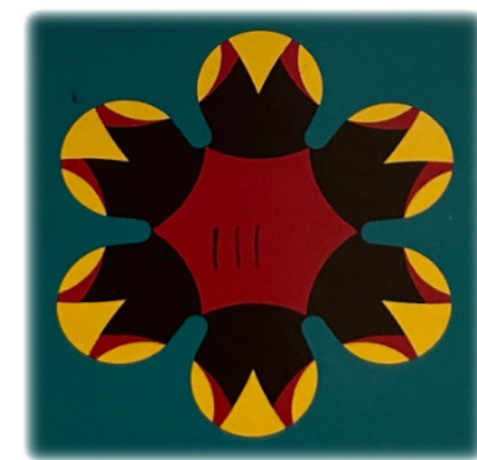
David and I leave for New Jersey to be with family and attend his brother's funeral January 7, 2016. The Feast of Lights is January 6 and Gwynn sent me a text: *Sending sweet drops of love infused raindrops your way today. Let them soak deep into your being and bring life and joy.*

January 16, 2016 is day 13 of my forty day countdown as I fly to Texas to be with Gwynn seven days. I write in my journal: It seems to me my sister is dying! Help me, Jesus. After reading my morning's devotional from Jesus Calling, I insert my thoughts into the devotional. I am quoting:

January 16

COME TO ME, and rest in My loving Presence. You know that this day will bring difficulties, and you are trying to think your way through those trials. As you anticipate what is ahead of you, you forget that I am with you—now and always. Rehearsing (*Gwynn's possible death*) results in experiencing (*her death*) many times, whereas you are meant to go through (*this death experience*) only when (*it*) actually occurs. Do not multiply your suffering in this way! Instead, come to Me, and relax in My Peace. I will strengthen you and prepare you for this day, transforming your fear into confident trust (*Ok Jesus, I'll try*). "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." MATTHEW 11:28–30

I process using symbols. One of my symbols is a Kaleidograph I change as the Lord initiates. He did so today. This is the #111 time it has changed since September 13, 2014. I am doing the designs in order, but I am always amazed that the next one in line evokes deep resonance with me symbolically for the current circumstances



Black - represents Gwynn's approaching death.

Yellow - Higher Ground, facing life on earth without her here.

Green - It is a growth opportunity.

Red - I am rooted in Christ...I can find joy and peace in this death with God's help.

I had trouble going to sleep so I listened to Graham Cooke's CD on Living on a Higher Place and went to sleep before the CD finished holding my wooden cross as a reminder that God never let's go of our hand and will walk me through this Shadow of Death.

January 17, 2016

I wake determined to be at ease in this journey with Gwynn...not dis-eased. During the remaining days of my visit I go with Gwynn 1) to church, 2) to her last week of treatment with Dr. K, 3) have a conversation with her about the possibility of her approaching death that she initiates, 4) help the family with Reese Day (Gwynn's day with her granddaughter), and 5) join in the celebration of her husband's birthday. I fly home January 23 (Day 20 of my countdown) under a full moon...the Wolf Moon also known as the Center Moon. Used by the Assiniboine people, it refers to the idea that this moon roughly marks the middle of the winter season.

January 26, 2016

After talking with Gwynn by phone at the end of the day, I get the impression that she is in the worst pain to date. I go to bed with a heavy heart.

January 27, 2016

In my prayer room the next morning I hear God whispering in Bettina Schuller's breath prayer: God is present. God is joy. I am present. I rejoice. He reminds me: the sun is shining even on rainy or cloudy days! The sun is shining brightly above the disturbance below.

Prayer for Gwynn: *Abba penetrate the cancer surrounding Gwynn's heart with Your abundant love for her. Demolish the stronghold of lies that have erected walls around Gwynn's*

heart that declare she is not worthy of love. Great Physician perform the surgery necessary to open Gwynn's heart to receive more of You. As you fill her heart, command the pain to BE STILL! I pray this on the authority of Jesus name, Amen

I asked God to give me a physical sign that He is with me in this cancer shadow of death. I need this physical proof to anchor me as I walk with my sister. I want to walk with joy, not sorrow and only God has the power to make that kind of transformation in my heart.

As I sing my morning songs, I continue to feel reassurance of His presence and guidance.

Lyrics: Into Your Hands

Don't let the pain of life disturb you.

From all your fears be free.

All of life is but a moment.

Don't be disturbed with what will be.

Stay on the road and walk with patience as you listen to His call.

He who holds you never changes.

Our God is Lord of all.

Into Your hands we place our spirits.

To Your will we pledge our lives.

You have redeemed us for the truth.

Your Love alone will suffice.



Lyrics: Surround Me with Love

Sometimes when life's poison arrows shoot me to the ground,

Dreams come falling down. Help just can't be found.

I don't worry, I don't wonder. I know what to do.

I don't go crazy, I go to You.

Surround me with love, I need you beside me.

I need you to hold and hide me

when this world closes in on me.

Surround me with love O and I can make it.

Whatever comes You know I can take it

Just as long as You surround me with love.

Who can say what comes tomorrow.

What the future holds.

What lies down the road

Only Heaven knows.

But one thing I know for certain.

One thing that is true.

One thing I'm sure of is I need You.

As I finished singing Surround Me with Love, a shower of leaves fell outside my prayer room door. Thank you, Abba for the physical and visual reminder that You shower me with love throughout each day. I hear Abba whisper: Rest in My love, Sherry! Model that for Gwynn.

January 29, 2016

On day 26 of forty, Abba gave me symbolically two tablets of stone inscribed with the finger of God. You, Sherry, are no longer to carry guilt and shame.....I carried them with me to the cross. The debt is paid. "Jesus paid it all. All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow."



I receive a nudge to change my Kaleidograph to #112. It is created with four color panels representing to me the four Gospels.

Red - I am rooted and grounded in my faith

Gray - There is a lot I do not understand about suffering

Orange - Love of life-relationships-particularly with my sister

Black - walking in the Shadow of Death



Quoting my blog entitled: Playing with the Stuff:

I was intrigued by Allison Bown's phraseology in Joyful Intentionality when she encouraged the reader to "play with the stuff." I am an elementary teacher by profession and in the last ten years of my career before retirement, I worked for a tutoring firm: BridgeHaven. I designed my lesson plans by teaching academics through play. Many of my students were challenged academically and my specialty was designing a specific plan for that student created around their individual interests. I called my skill..... finding their rhythm. Abba knows my rhythm and the deep desire of my heart is to "see Him" in the Shadow of Death I am walking with my sister who is a well child of God battling cancer. Our mother entered eternal life at the age of 53 after a twelve year battle with cancer. My sister is 58. I have been spending seven days each month with her since August 2015 helping her husband take care of her. January 2016 was her lowest ebb...the month I joined the Warrior Class. She was depressed, in a state of despair and speaking of approaching death. As I flew to Texas in February, I was fine tuning my receiver by singing daily on my prayer walks Open My Eyes.

Lyrics: Open My Eyes

Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.
To reach out and touch Him and say that I love Him.
Open my ears, Lord, and help me to listen.
Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.
Open my heart, Lord, that I might receive You.
Open my spirit and teach me to worship.
Open my lips, Lord, and teach me to praise You.
Open my eyes, Lord, I want to see Jesus.

February 6, 2016

I traveled first to Georgetown, Texas to attend the memorial service of my aunt on my mother's side of the family. When I did my prayer walk around my hotel after the funeral I received the answer to my January prayer for a physical manifestation of God's Presence with me. He repeated Himself four times. I was stunned and fascinated by the perfection of this heart

image. Then I discovered another one and it began to dawn on me that God cared enough to answer me. I was delighted and laughing by the third and ecstatic by the fourth. The God of the Universe heard and answered my prayer! A heart image for each of the four Gospels.



February 7, 2016

The next day I was visiting my brother and I did my prayer walk in his neighborhood and found five more heart images. God is soooooo good! Five is the number for Grace.



February 8, 2016

God pulled out all the stops for creativity by placing on my prayer walk a wide variety of heart images. A grand total of thirty to be exact! Thirty is the age Jesus was when He began his public ministry on earth.

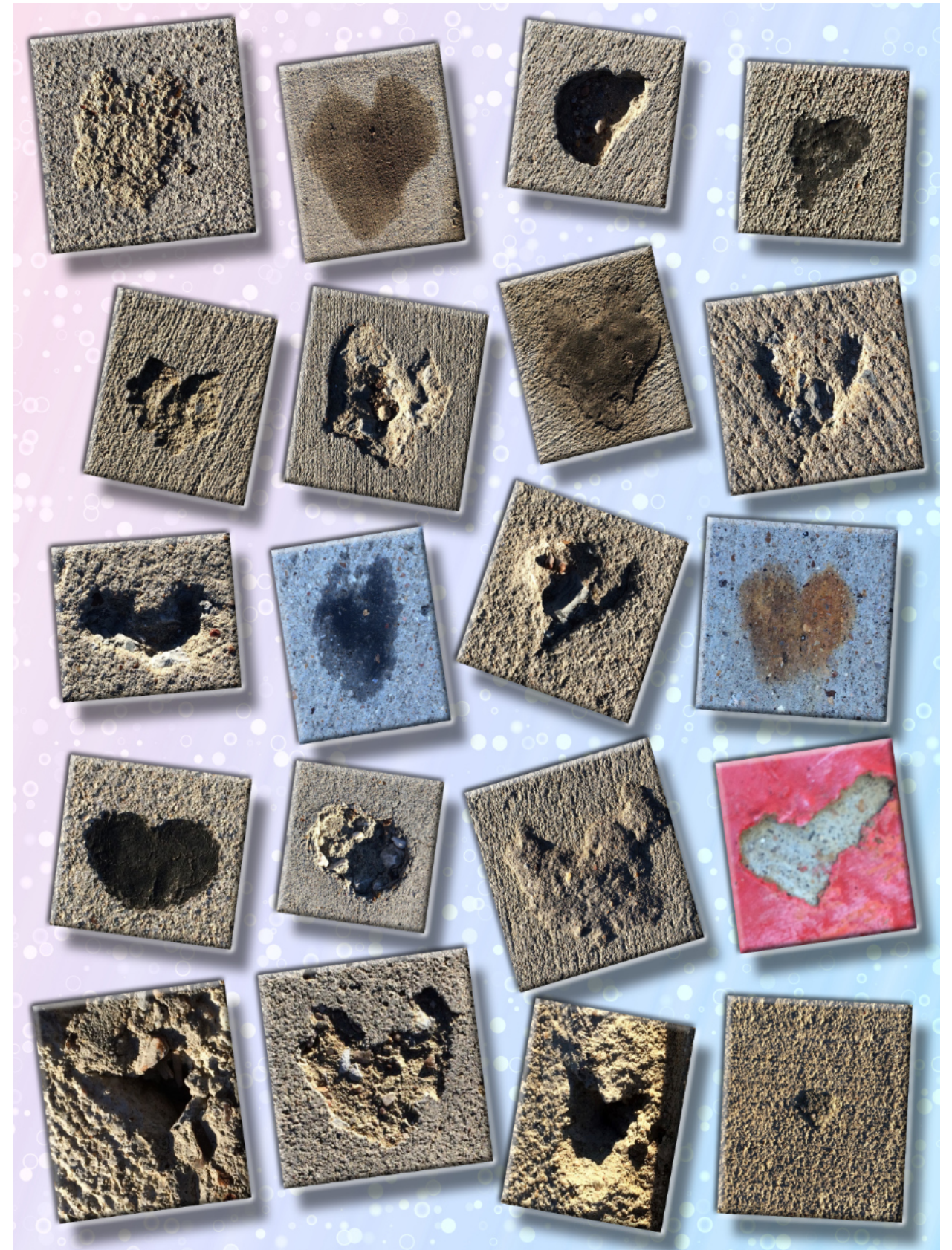


February 9, 2016

On my Prayer Walk today, I found three more heart images. You, Gwynn and I together, Lord, can face whatever comes. Thank you, Abba, for demonstrating Your bountiful love for me by answering my prayer.....manifesting in a physical form that reassures and comforts me. A daily love note from my Creator. "Love So Amazing!"



On February 10, I fly to Dallas to be present to my sister for a week. I feel NO HEAVINESS or ANXIETY as I make the flight to be with her. I do my prayer walk that day around her treatment center while she is receiving radiation on her chest for the tumor that is causing her the most pain. I found 20 hearts and created one of my own in thankful response. I am awed by the peace I feel each day and the joy and anticipation of the treasures I will find and the FUN of making the discoveries with Abba and feeling His pleasure, as well.



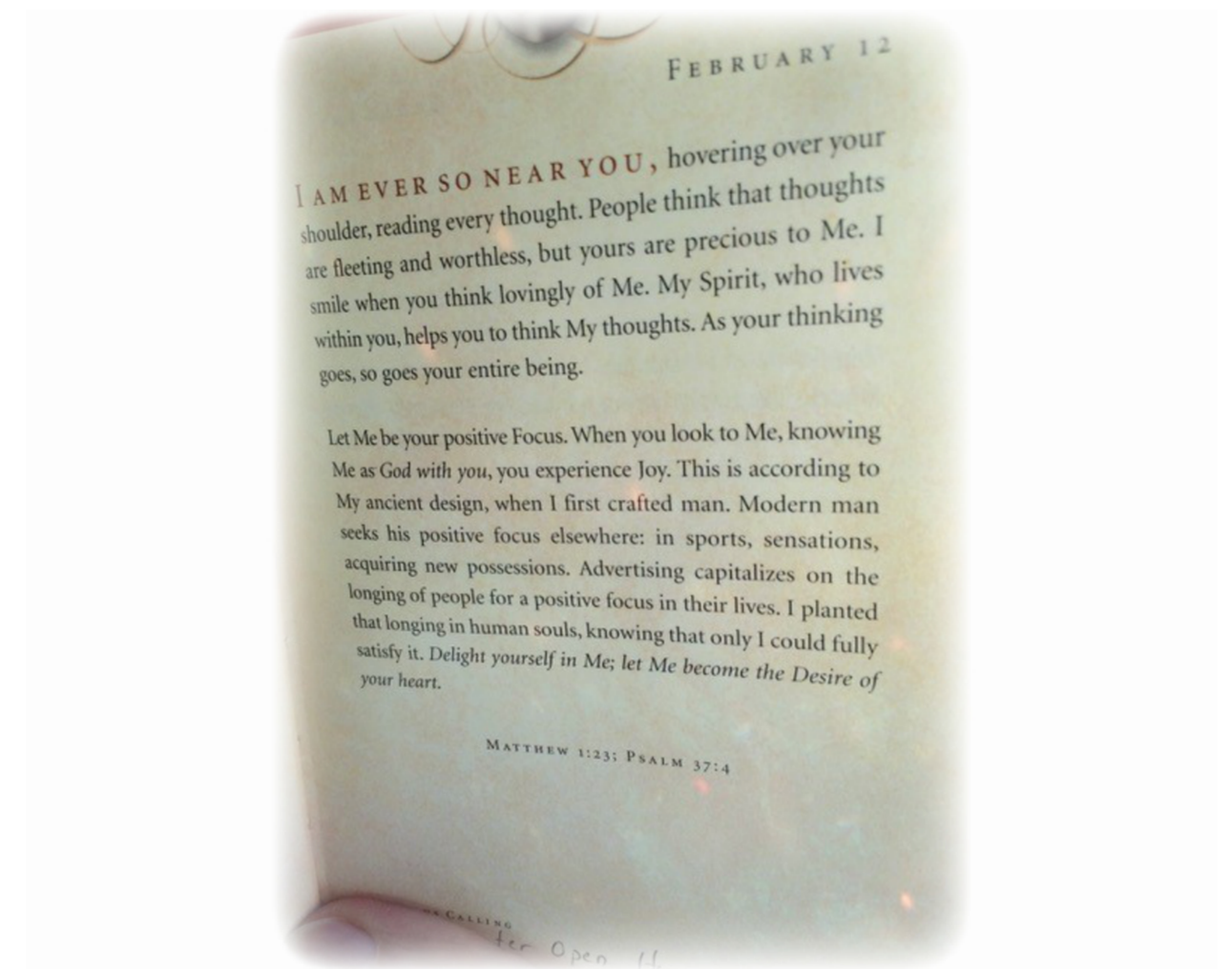
February 11, 2016
(Day 38 of Forty)

Yesterday was Ash Wednesday, the first day of 40 days of Lent. I have chosen to fast "fear of the future." I will focus now on God's presence with Gwynn and I on this earthly journey and practice being fully present to Gwynn for seven days each month until she graduates into her eternal life. I will intentionally sweep away any worry webs that form in my mind during the night daily. Today, Gwynn is again receiving radiation so I make a second Prayer Walk around the facility. I discover ten more heart images I did not see the day before. Jesus Calling's Devotional for February 11 resonates deeply in me and is an admonition I willingly embrace. Here are some highlights from the meditation: *On dark days, My Peace stands out in sharp contrast to your circumstances. See times of darkness as opportunities for my Light to shine in transcendent splendor. I am training you to practice peace that overpowers darkness. Do not grow weary and lose heart"*



February 12, 2016
(Day 39 of Forty)

Our brother, Clint, will join us tonight. I have such joyful anticipation of the opportunity for the three of us to be together again. As I read my morning devotional from **Jesus Calling**, there are hints of a rainbow color splotches crossing the words on the page and the warm sunlight striking my chest. I am wearing my butterfly sweater and the bling splattered the page with colors. Little did I know at that moment the Lord was using color to prophesy the miracle that would be taking place on Day Forty in the next twenty-four hours.



John 10: 28-30 was part of my devotional materials. I wrote a crafted prayer based on the scripture: Jesus speaking.....I give Gwynn eternal life and she shall never perish; no one will snatch her out of My hand (including cancer). My Father who gave Gwynn to me is greater than cancer, no one and no disease can snatch her out of My Father's hand. I and the Father are one.

Gwynn had her last treatment for the week at the Proton Center and I did my Prayer Walk around the Center during her treatment and a second Prayer Walk in her yard later in the afternoon while Gwynn napped. I photographed a total of 38 heart images for the day.



February 13 2016
(Day Forty)

Even though I had written the scriptural declaration the night before, I was still a bundle of nerves. My brother had come in to be with us the night before. He did not come out of his room until after 10:00 AM. I began to wonder if I had been counting down to his death instead of my sister's. But he finally arose and so did my sister. He and my brother in law went on an outing. Gwynn and I stayed home because Gwynn was feeling poorly. Her heart was racing. I wanted to call 911. Gwynn commented that she was not interested in going to the Emergency Room again. The doctors would just declare, as they had done multiple times before, that she had Stage Four Cancer and there was nothing they could do. So instead, my sister texted her youngest son who is an EMT. While we waited for his response, my sister lay down on the sofa in the living room and put her feet on my lap. I read to her to give us both something to focus on other than her rapid heart beat. The book was entitled: **Storm Sisters** (Very appropriate don't you think?) A crystal hanging in the window cast rainbows on the pages of the book I was reading. It was a bit unnerving to me because I recalled my mom laying on the couch the last day of her life short of breath. I wanted to call 911 then, but she asked me to sing to her which I did for thirty minutes and she died later in the day while I was in church.

A text came in from my sister's son. It was a picture of a text book page of several methods to restart your heart so it would return to normal beats. After each method was described, there was a qualifier which stated: "Don't try this method without first clearing it with your doctor." By the time my sister read the fourth one we broke into hysterical laughter at the absurdity of this page in our situation. We both laughed so hard we could hardly breathe. The action of extreme laughter restarted my sister's heart and her pulse returned to normal (*"For My Thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My Ways," declares the Lord. Isaiah 55: 8-9*). I did not fully realize the miracle I had just witnessed until after Gwynn's death the following year. I was just relieved her heart had returned to a normal rhythm. My sister was fine the rest of the day. We even took a walk together around the neighborhood and discovered 17 heart images.



We made pictures with my brother in Gwynn's backyard before heading to church. After the service Clint prayed with Alan, Gwynn and myself in the church parking lot before returning to his home in Georgetown, TX.



The gift/miracle of February 13, 2016 was peace. Peace-the gift of a return to a normal heart rhythm. Peace-the gift of sibling connection. Peace-the gift in prayer surrendering the outcome to God. Peace-the gift of Valentine cheer sent from a loved one back in Georgia. Peace-the gift of the possibility of resurrection because of the sacrifice Jesus made in our behalf. Sarah Young expresses the concept well in her Jesus Calling Devotional for February 13: "Peace be with you! Ever since the resurrection, this has been My watchword to those who yearn for Me. As you sit quietly, let My Peace settle over you and enfold you in My loving Presence. To provide this radiant Peace for you, I died a criminal's death. Receive My Peace abundantly and thankfully. It is a rare treasure, dazzling in delicate beauty, yet strong enough to withstand all onslaughts. Wear My Peace with regal dignity. It will keep your heart and mind close to Mine."

February 14, 2016

Valentines Day was quiet and restful. I found one heart on our walk in the afternoon. I also took a picture of Gwynn as a testimony that on the fortieth day Gwynn's LIFE was extended for 400 additional days. What an awesome gift to all of us who treasure our time spent with Gwynn....a living testimony to the goodness of Our God.



February 15, 2016

I open my shades to say my morning prayer and in one corner of the window was a heart shaped bug. I immediately felt in my spirit Abba was giving my sister her heart's desire to live and be well enough to enjoy the wedding of her youngest son May 21, 2016 and have the energy to dance the mother /son dance at the reception.



One of the activities Gwynn and I enjoy is putting together jigsaw puzzles. Today we completed a rather large one with the help of her eldest son who put in the last piece that had dropped to the floor.

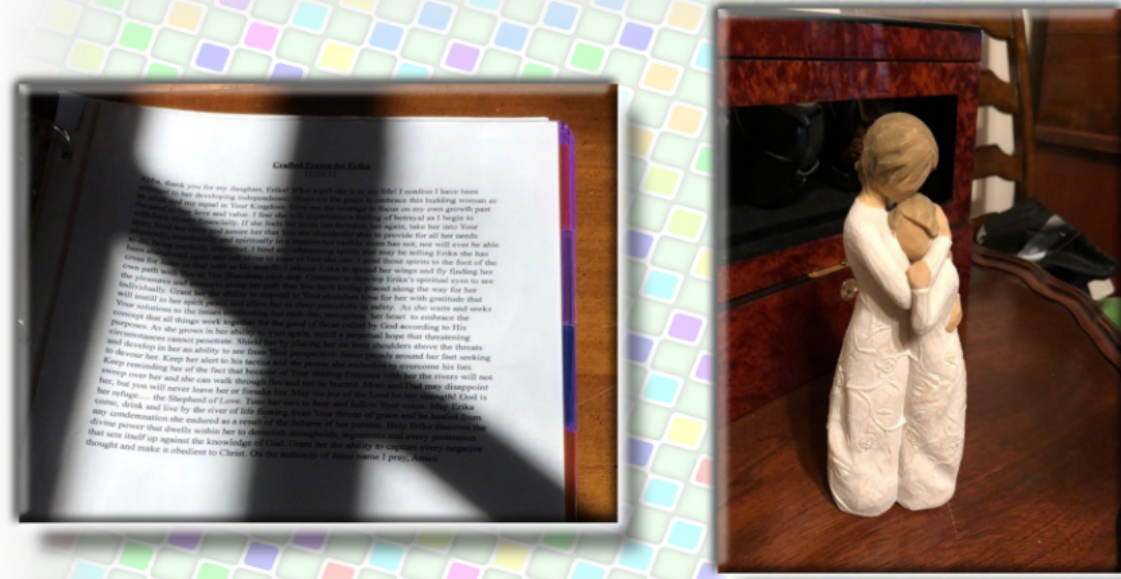


This is Gwynn's last week of radiation. While she rested after the treatment, I did my prayer walk around the neighborhood. Including the bug found this morning, I discovered 11 heart images.



When I returned to my room, the afternoon sun put a cross shadow on the page of a crated prayer I wrote concerning my daughter. I have been praying this prayer since 11-23-15. There remains a lot of brokenness between my daughter and I since I divorced her father in 1994. In making a decision to divorce, I became, in my daughter's eyes, enemy number one. She was 12 at the time of the divorce and she left to live with her father in Maryland while I remained in Georgia for two long years in which we

had limited, tense contact. Although she was, at this time back in my life, the buried anger still surfaced from time to time and our relationship maintained a heaviness of past pain and mistrust. I waited 27 years for healing to take place in our relationship. The evidence of healing transformation for my daughter and I arrived on my birthday in the year 2021, five years after this date-February 15, 2016. The number five and the cross represent GRACE, and GRACE is evident in this walk with my sister!



February 16, 2016

On my last full day in Texas with Gwynn, I opened the blinds to find a huge cross in the morning sky.



As I left my room, I discovered splotches of rainbow colors on the hall closet door.



I received these gifts as a celebration of the new life Gwynn was now living empowered by the Spirit of Life that made His dwelling within her.

On my prayer walk around the neighborhood and Gwynn's treatment center, I found a total of 16 heart images.



Reese spent a few hours with us. She arrived pretty in pink.



February 17, 2016

As I headed home I marveled at the fact that I had discovered a total of 151 heart images during my February trip to Texas. Thank you, Abba, for the abundant physical reminders of Your presence with me in the Shadow of Death. Thank you for lifting the heaviness off my heart and showing me in such a tangible, visible way, that it is possible to experience joy on the battlefield. I had NO IDEA what that looked like before this week. There are INSTEADS waiting to be discovered.....gifts from our Creator who promises: seek and ye shall find (Matthew 7: 7). My God can do immeasurably more than I can ask or imagine (Ephesians 3:20). Thank you, Allison Bown, for sharing your insight through your book, **Joyful Intentionality**, that helped facilitate a process that brought healing to my soul and a joyful intentionality to go deeper into the heart of God that dwells within me. Thank you Sarah Young in your devotional from Jesus Calling for February 17 that provided verbiage to express what I feel the Spirit downloading into my heart:

“Your relationship with Me is meant to be vibrant and challenging, as I invade more and more areas of your life. Do not fear change, for I am making you a new creation, with old things passing away and new things continually on the horizon. When you cling to old ways and sameness, you resist My work within you. I want you to embrace all that I am doing in your life, finding your security in Me alone.”