

A Time for Laying Down
A conversation from a traveler's journey from tragedy to triumph
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By Ralaine Fagone

Breathless, I arrive it to the next vista point. While one step alone offered little progress, one step added to many was necessary to get this far. As I catch my breath I begin looking over the territory I have traversed during the last four years. I slip the backpack off my shoulders, and then grip the pack, pulling it close to my heart. I offer a whispered prayer: *I did not think I would make it this far.* The pack plops to the ground. *Lord, I thank you for the provision you have given me, this pack has been a faithful servant.*

From this view the traveled terrain looks like an obstacle course. While pondering I can spot the fork in the road where I needed to offer forgiveness to my offender; I notice the desert where Father taught me how to live differently, and the land He asked me to walk without a map while I learned how to keep my spirit in step with His. I recall how each section stretched me and pushed me to new levels. In each place I became acquainted with new dimensions in God: His ways, His love toward others, and me. This journey was thrust upon me, but in this space I stand satisfied I traveled each portion. God was present and at work on my behalf even in the most dry parched places. When traveling through those places I looked for Him but I did not always see Him, He seemed hidden. But, from this vista I can see clearly with new understanding: I was never alone.

"Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland. (Isaiah 43:18-19 NIV)

This journey has taken me to places I never dreamed of. I have experienced new things. The new relationships forged and companions gained are lovingly embedded in my heart. The dormant gifts and talents in my life are beginning to bloom. These are my rewards from Father for persevering.

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."~ Joseph (Genesis 50:20 NIV)

Teaching a Bible Study at a women's prison was not even a blip on my radar screen before my son's arrest. Now I adore my sisters-in-Christ at VSWP and love teaching them. They are my joy. Added opportunities to share the goodness of Father with others are a new delight. These new life-giving experiences have arisen from a tragedy filled with great pain and loss.

Four years ago Editor-in-Chief Dot Powell asked if I would be a columnist for SALT. Her encouragement and enthusiasm opened up new realms to me. Dot has the amazing gift of promoting others' talents and sharing them with the body of Christ. I have been the blessed

recipient of her extravagant gift. It humbles me... really. Dot and SALT Magazine are a reward Father has blessed me with on this journey. I discovered a writing style that complements the message of God's goodness towards us when circumstances around us are dire. This is something I never would have even thought possible four years ago.

I marvel at the re-creative ability of our God. He takes broken, messy circumstances and turns them into a benefit for those who love Him. Our enemy, the devil is shown to be a defeated foe once God arrives on the scene. I think Father enjoys showing off as He takes our tragedies, redeems them and strengthens us. He shines.

But He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. ~ Paul (2 Cor. 12:9 NIV)

There is a new path I am to travel. To prepare, it is necessary for me to empty my backpack before the new pilgrimage begins. It is hard to let go of some things I have become accustomed, like my SALT column. As a traveler I have emptied myself of the relevant things I learned from this tragedy that would benefit you, the reader. I will not be far: I will continue to assist Dot Powell and Managing Editor Kim Bagato. I am dedicated to see this magazine's vision continue. I enjoy the people who make SALT possible by giving generously from their resources. I will show up on occasion to write on subjects Father may place on my heart. It is my desire to give you a fresh look at the ordinary things we encounter as we walk with God.

The contents of my backpack have been sorted. I am leaving many items behind so I may pursue this new direction unencumbered. I notice a new book carefully placed inside the backpack with empty pages beckoning to be finished by my hand. I sense I am walking towards a territory Father has created for us to enjoy together. After the buckle is securely fastened, I slip the pack on my back. I am ready for the next leg of the journey. Any journey is made better when shared with Father God. My eyes are no longer fixed on the destination, but they are looking for Him. There He is! He is on the move, re-creating as I walk with Him. So-long! I need to be moving along.