

The Threshing floor

AN ANGEL UNAWARE

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."
(Heb. 13: 2).

The first time I read Dale Evan's book, entitled, "Angel Unaware," I was frankly unimpressed. In fact, I was mildly critical. It seemed to me that she went to great lengths to create a spiritual lesson from a personal tragedy. In this book she tells of the birth of their Down's Syndrome girl, Robin, who died at an early age.

A few months after reading this book, I was to painfully pick it up and attempt to read it again. I could not get past the first few pages because of the scalding tears that blurred my eyes and the racking sobs that nearly drowned my reason. For we, too, had experienced a visit from an angel that came to us -- unawares!

David Paul Del Vecchio was born September 9th, 1972, in a small private clinic in Torremolinos, Spain. It was a difficult pregnancy for Rhoda, and I often experienced a reaction that was totally foreign to my former attitude. Many times when I would look at her and think of the unborn child, I would feel irritated and restless. It was senseless and I knew it.

My spirit was sensing something that my mind could not grasp until one day it struck furiously, as a numbing, blinding pain!

I paced back and forth in the corridor of the hospital waiting for news of the long overdue birth. After what seemed like hours the tense face of the doctor appeared. He curtly said that if the baby did not come quickly he would have to perform a cesarean section. The water had burst prematurely which was a bad omen to him.

The baby was in a wrong position and he could not do anything about it. He was clearly disturbed and agitated. I begged him to wait for at least another twenty minutes feeling intuitively that it would be best for Rhoda and what she would have wanted.

Fear sometimes nagged at the back of my mind when I remembered that a Roman Catholic doctor may sometimes decide to save the infant if he is faced with a desperate choice.

My nails bit into my flesh as I tried to pray and cry out to God for my wife. Finally the tension was broken by the appearance of a nurse who announced perfunctorily, "Your wife has given birth to a baby boy." Even though I was clearly relieved, I still had that numb feeling that I could not explain. The joy that normally accompanied the birth of one of our children was plainly missing.

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The doctor reappeared and seemed tired and upset. He spoke to a Christian worker who had been working with us for a number of years. She had been a Roman Catholic nun for eleven years and had known this doctor when she worked in the hospital with him as a nurse. She had been filled with the Holy Spirit in our apartment shortly after our arrival in Spain.

The doctor ignored me completely and made several observations to her. He was obviously very careless with his words and seemed not to realize the traumatic experience those words would create for me. He said, avoiding me, "It is a Mongoloid. It is terribly deformed. The liver is distended and the spleen is enlarged. It is the worse case of mongolism that I have ever seen. It cannot possibly live for more than twenty four hours. In fact, it would be much better for her (Rhoda) that it die." And then he said words to this effect, "What a horrible thing God did to give her this part to play!"

The blood drained from my face. I sat down heavily, my throat was suddenly dry. I was disbelieving and numb. The blow had been totally unexpected and I was caught completely off guard!

Later the question would be shouted from every part of my being, Why? Why? WHY? WHY? did this happen to us?

God showed me much later that even though our Lord said from the cross, "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" yet He did not die with that question on His lips. He went beyond the WHY to these words of confidence, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

At this point my mind was racing ahead, already making plans. I thought of the funeral plans. I would bury it secretly. No one would ever know and we would somehow adopt a normal child.

Then the doctor broke into my thoughts with these words, "Be sure not to tell her. The shock may be too much for her in this weakened state and she can go into shock or hemorrhage. Keep it from her at all costs."

That was to prove a difficult task for me!

With leaden feet I climbed the stairs, my eyes avoiding the operating room where our son was being given auxiliary attention. As I came into her room, she was lying quietly, still under the effects of the anesthesia. Her face was white and drained. Her lips parched and swollen where she had bitten them in pain. I kissed her gently. I wondered how I could face her questions. How could I keep this a secret until the death of the baby?

She must have sensed my presence in the room for she opened her eyes. A smile flashed across her tired face. She had won -- and lost?

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"How is the baby?" That dreaded question was already upon me!

"Is it a boy? It IS a boy, isn't it? How is my David Paul?" And now her voice was soft and warm. We had planned to give him this name, months, in fact years before. But such a lovely name seemed so senseless to me at this point. I mumbled something. She kept insisting, "It is a boy, isn't it?"

"Yes dear." I replied.

"He IS well, isn't he?"

Then a look of fear and consternation crossed her face.

"Is he alright? He is well, isn't he? HOW IS MY BABY?" Her voice was rising now. I tried to comfort her and to get her to relax but she insisted.

"Does he have all his fingers? Is there something wrong with his leg? SOMETHING IS WRONG WITH HIS LEGS!" She said tensely.

"No dear." I said, trying to keep my composure. "He is alright. Nothing is wrong with his leg."

"There is something wrong with my baby!" She was becoming tenser by the minute. This is what I had feared and had desperately tried to avoid. The doctor had warned me about this. "Be sure she doesn't know, the shock may be too much for her." But she had seen it in my face, and said later that she had seen a strange sorrowful look of pity in the nurse's eyes.

I was nearly drowning, not only in my own pain, but now seeing her tortured face only compounded the agony in my heart. I fought desperately to keep my emotions under control. I would try to keep it from her for as long as I could. She must have time to recover her strength. But soon she would know, and how I feared the consequences! Then it dawned slowly upon her. She seemed to gain strength. "It is a Mongol." She said softly.

I went to the bathroom and all the pent up pain came flooding out in torrents of grief. I felt suddenly so alone and helpless. Who could help us now? Where was God? What had happened? What had gone wrong? It was devastating!

A few days later, the Lord graciously gave me this song. I cannot sing it now, but then it meant so much to me.

Is there a God who understands,
Is there a God who holds my hands,
Is there a God who feels my pain,
Is there a God, I ask again?

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Though darkness hide His lovely face,
And pain becloud His saving grace,
Yes, there's a God, I still believe,
THERE IS A GOD !

Some day as God, I'll understand,
Some day in that bright, other Land,
Where there's no pain, no death, no night,
Where God Himself, shall be the Light.
Then He will tell me of His plan,
To form my life, at His command.
Yes, there's a God, I still believe...
THERE IS A GOD !

David remained at the hospital under intensive care for a few days. Three days later the pediatrician came to examine him. Rhoda was still in bed when he arrived. The pediatrician's attitude was completely different from that of the obstetrician. He was a young, boyish-looking man, possibly in his early thirties. He was trying to encourage us, but everything he was saying was creating another, even more devastating reaction in me. I had resigned myself to the terrible tragedy that had struck our home. Soon I thought, it would be over and we would be able to pick up the pieces. Hope would return and the roses would bloom again.

On and on he droned, while I became more impatient. Finally, I blurted out, "Doctor, will he live?" "LIVE? Why, yes, he'll live. He is recuperating rapidly. He'll live for at least thirty years! Mongoloids do not have a very long life span you know!"

His words struck me as a sledgehammer blow! I reeled under them and nearly fainted on the empty bed next to Rhoda's. It was as if a prison sentence had just been pronounced by the judge.

David would not die, but we would have to live with this day after day, year after year! My God, it was too much to endure!

Rhoda took it well. Much better than I had expected. In fact she had had some premonition of the approaching tragedy. Nine months before, the word MONGOLOID had flashed as a vision across her mind. The weaker sex is not so weak, I discovered!

After the doctor had gone, she insisted on going down to the nursery to see the baby. "I want to see my baby." she insisted. "I want to hold him."

I could not bring myself to hold him, nor even to look at him after the terrible and vivid description the obstetrician had given me. The mental image that I had formed was torturing my mind. Sensing her inner bravery, I reluctantly agreed. I had no idea of the desperate battle that had been raging within her for the last three days.

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The Holy Spirit had insisted, "Go get your baby." Her heart had not yielded to the point of accepting his deformity. It was a cross that she recoiled from. There was no joy that she could see beyond the cross -- only pain and shame and hopelessness.

Then the Lord gave her a solemn warning. It was in the words recorded in Matthew 18:10,

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven."

She took the baby into her arms and brought it with her into the privacy of her room. She now says that it was as if the Holy Spirit had covered her with a glorious canopy, a protection from the terrible pain. His presence was so strong in the room that she was enfolded in His warm love. She was bathed in it! Then she could see the Savior hanging from bleeding hands from His cross. His arms were opened wide, not held there by the nails. But she seemed to understand as never before, it was because of His love. Those arms were embracing the entire world. He had willingly received us, vile and deformed and unclean. He had not been ashamed to draw our uncleanness into His bosom. And now He gently said, "Will you not receive your own child?"

He assured her that His love could change the vilest sinner. It was a transforming love. Those who willingly came within the embrace of those arms, and who were touched by those nail-pierced hands were changed. It was redeeming, transforming love.

He impressed upon her that His love would strengthen her and give her the ability to change this situation into a blessing. She began hoping that God would heal our son. New faith was growing into her heart. She thought, "It is for the glory of God, He will perform a miracle!"

She was to learn later, that even though He may not perform a miracle by changing our outward circumstances, He could perform a miracle in our hearts. Though He may not choose to deliver us from our TRIALS, He can use them to DELIVER US FROM OURSELVES!

There, in our Gethsemane, we both learned to pray, "Father, let this cup pass. Nevertheless, not my will, but Thine be done."

I have discovered that when the Lord allows the heart of one of His children to be broken, He always deposits within it something precious of Himself, before He closes the wound.

The Lord was to speak to me a few days later. It seemed that for the first few days after this experience, the pain was so severe that I could not, would not hear! Finally, the message came through.

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"And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me." (Matt. 18:5).

We wondered how we could tell our other three children that David would never be a normal child. They loved him and doted on him. But I wondered what they would think if they knew how their little brother would be when he grew up. My fears were totally unnecessary.

One day while in church, we received a visit from a kind Jewish couple from New York. They had spoken to one of our church members and found out that our boy was Mongoloid. There is usually an instant rapport between parents of retarded children. It seems that suffering these heart-breaks is like speaking many languages. It helps one to communicate to many different people.

They came in with their David, a little Mongoloid boy of about nine. He was perfectly behaved, and was a precious child. He seemed quite alert and sat quietly by his mother as she proudly told me of her boy's accomplishments.

Before they left, an idea occurred to me. Would she mind if we introduced her David to our day-school class? The class was being held in the church school room and our three children were present. David marched proudly in, with no sign of embarrassment or timidity. He had perfect composure. He introduced himself and shook hands with each one of the children. The kids were thrilled! He promptly picked up our youngest girl, Becky, and began carrying her around. He wanted to take her home, he said. The children instantly fell in love with him. He was different, and they loved it!

After David had left, my children asked, "Is our David going to be like him? I wish our David would be like him. We just love him!"

And so, our God has gentle ways of leading His sheep beside still waters and restoring their souls.

Prophesying of the coming ministry of Christ, Isaiah wrote:

"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted... to comfort all that mourn;

TO APPOINT UNTO THOSE WHO MOURN IN ZION to give unto them

BEAUTY FOR ASHES,

THE OIL OF JOY FOR MOURNING,

THE GARMENT OF PRAISE FOR THE SPIRIT OF HEAVINESS." (Isa. 61: 1-3).

The Lord has shown us that disappointment is His appointment.

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No good thing will He withhold,
From denials oft we gather
Treasures of His love untold.
Well He knows each broken purpose
Leads to fuller, deeper trust,
And the end of all His dealings
Proves our God is wise and just.

Edith Lillian Young ⁽¹⁾

Ezekiel the prophet said, "Then I came to them of the captivity... and I sat where they sat, and remained there overwhelmed among them seven days." (Ezekiel 3: 15).

"I SAT WHERE THEY SAT."

This experience has opened up a new world for us. The world of the handicapped. It has unstopped the fountain of God's love so that it can flow unhindered to people who are different and who are unloved. Every time I see a Mongoloid, I almost feel as if he is my son. A new horizon of opportunities has risen. I pray that God will lead me daily, to open my arms to all people.

It has also given me a deep appreciation for a normal child. Oh! The incalculable worth of a perfect child!

What a precious gift God lays at our feet; what opportunities to invest in eternity! How little I appreciated the miraculous handiwork of God before. How deep is the grace of God, the sufficient supply of God Himself, given to us unmerited and undeserved!

I will not doubt, though all my prayers return
Unanswered from the still, white realm above;
I will believe it is an all-wise love
Which has refused those things for which I yearn;
And though at times I cannot keep from grieving,
Yet the pure ardour of my fixed believing
Undimmed shall burn.

I will not doubt; though sorrows fall like rain,
And troubles swarm like bees about a hive;
I will believe the heights for which I strive
Are only reached by anguish and by pain;
And though I groan and writhe beneath my crosses,
I yet shall see through my severest losses
The greater gain.

I will not doubt, well anchored is this faith ,
Like some staunch ship, my soul braves every gale;
So strong its courage that it will not quail
To breast the mighty unknown sea of death.
O, may I cry, though body parts with spirit,
"I do not doubt," so listening worlds may hear it,

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With my last breath.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox ⁽²⁾

Today David is a happy, loving, mischievous little boy. He still cannot speak intelligibly but he surely can communicate! He has brought us many blessings and taught us many lessons. He is teaching the meaning of mercy and the exercise of love. God has used him as an angel to show us our own hearts. I was able to see so clearly the selfishness that still exists. Our human love is so impure, and we always expect something in return for our love. During this time God gave me a heart-searching prayer that became a song :

Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
For I am barren clay without Thy love;
Burn deep within my heart O flame of God
And baptize me afresh O heavenly dove.

Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
For long has sinful passion held control;
Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
And cleanse my selfish heart and make me whole.

Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
Lord cleanse my way until I am pure gold;
Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
And may I be the fuel to light the world.

Send Thy cleansing flame, burn up the dross
And may I now with love embrace my cross,
Burn deep within my heart O flame of God,
Let the glow of heaven shine from me.

If God has allowed pain and tragedy in your life, if today you are going through deep waters, be strengthened and know that the Lord always has His way in the storm. He will not forsake you! He has a glorious purpose in this that you cannot see now. Trust when you cannot understand.

Remember,

"All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. " (Rom. 8: 28).

"This is from Me," the Saviour said,
As bending low He kissed my brow,
"For One who loves you thus has led.
Just rest in Me, be patient now,
Your Father knows you have need of this,
Though, why perchance you cannot see –
Grieve not for things you've seemed to miss.
The thing I send is best for thee."

Then, looking through my tears, I plead,
"Dear Lord, forgive, I did not know,

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'Twill not be hard since, Thou dost tread,
Each path before me here below,
And for my good this thing must be,
His grace is sufficient for each test.
So still I'll sing, "Whatsoever be
God's way for me is always best."

Author unknown ⁽³⁾

⁽¹⁾ "Disappointment -- His Appointment", by Edith Lillian Young

Poems that Preach compiled by John R. Rice

Published by "Sword of the Lord Foundation" Murfreesboro Tennessee

⁽²⁾ "Faith", by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

ibid.

⁽³⁾ "This is from me", author unknown

ibid.