

I CRIED OUT,
YOU ANSWERED ME

By SHEREE MCMILLEN

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Dealing with the events occurring in 2006 left me analyzing not only the events leading up to my husband's breakdown, but my life in general. Now analyzing is something that I do, **a lot**. I don't know why, I just do. And as I was performing my analysis, it caused me to reflect on why I reacted and handled situations as I did during Bart's intense struggle. I have never before been in a position like I was in 2006. Critical decisions concerning the help and medical attention for another person were mine. I was the one in control, calling the shots. I had help and support, but ultimately Bart's health and future was up to me. With that responsibility came a level of fear and a greater dependence on God. Aware of the results that I wanted to see, my focus became clear, precise, and unwavering. I didn't know how we were going to get there, but I knew where we were going and I knew that God was the only way it could happen.

One way that I feel that God provided for us was in the support group that we had. To these precious people, I am forever grateful. This is something that I highly recommend to anyone who might find themselves in a similar situation. Turn to those you can trust. Typically, I am a very independent person. I will do it myself if I can, and if I can't, it is then that I ask for help. Don't try to do it by yourself because you can't. It is imperative that you seek those you can trust for help and support. You are not alone nor are you the first person to ever face a situation like yours, and the sooner that you accept it, the sooner you and your loved one will be on the road to recovery—albeit a long road, but the right road.

I was concerned about sharing the details of Bart's condition which caused me to be very protective of him. I was careful to keep him and the details of his condition from those who would take advantage of his vulnerability. I have never been embarrassed that Bart had a nervous breakdown. I was heartbroken that he was suffering. Regardless of how frustrated I would be with him sometimes, I was always aware of preserving his dignity. Bart was so misunderstood by so many, including me, but I knew that I was the one setting the tone on the perception of Bart and that I would be much more forgiving of him than others. If I was leaving an image of Bart with anyone, I wanted it to be one that was preserving his dignity. This is one of the reasons that I only confided in a few; also because I didn't have time to consult with a large number of people. Bart was requiring so much of my time, as well as all of the typical responsibilities that come with being the mother of three small children.

I only shared our situation with a handful of people who weren't medical professionals. They each played a significant role in this ordeal, and without these people and the prayers of so many, we would not have made it. Our support system included Sherry Rickard, one of my best friends from high school, Sarah Beutelschies, my aunt, Bruce and Rachel Reeves, local friends, and R. L. and Patsy McMillen, Bart's parents.

Sherry's role was a supportive sounding board. She lives a few hours away with her own family which did not allow her the opportunity to be in Conway. This didn't matter because the role that she played was exactly what was needed.

Sarah is also one who does not live in Conway, but provided necessary support and encouragement. Being only eight years older than me, Sarah has always been more like a sister. I have always adored her. She is very positive, proactive, and plan-oriented. She helped to keep my thinking straight during this time. I have always trusted Sherry and Sarah. They had our best interest at heart, and I desperately needed a support group in order to share the circumstances. Even though they weren't involved with the ins and outs of the daily struggle, the importance of their role was without measure.

Bruce and Rachel live in Conway, and Bruce preaches at the local church where we attend services. They are also very good friends of ours. Not only were they sounding boards for us, they also played an essential role in the process of Bart's recovery. These two were responsible for me keeping my sanity. They were available 24/7 and directly involved with the ins and outs of our life at this time, and believe me, we needed them.

The other two making up our support group were Bart's parents. They provided support and confidence for me which meant more than I can ever express. They have always had an active role in Bart's life and in our life since Bart and I began seeing each other. They don't meddle or pry, and their family is their life. With the circumstances being as they were with Bart and his condition, they never tried to take over. They consulted me. They honored my requests and supported my decisions. There were times when I would have to deal with just one of them because of the communication loop. With more than two people involved, communication can become sketchy, and quite honestly I don't prefer communicating this way. I prefer direct communication. I am clear in where I stand, and at a time like this there was no time for any additional confusion.

As we began the uphill climb following the crash, I found that there were specific individuals best suited for specific areas of repair. My father-in-law was who I worked with concerning the business because he had been one of the partners in the original business with Bart. There were financial issues to address which

required his help. He was also a big help when it came to dealing with Bart's emotional state. It was after Bart's emotional state became moderately balanced that my mother-in-law was most instrumental. Once all of the information was shared and Bart felt safe that our relationship was not in jeopardy, he became more active in turning the situation around.

I would also like to acknowledge our three wonderful children. I am forever grateful for them and what they bring to my life. They are responsible for providing me with one of my most treasured roles in life—motherhood. I could go on and on about them but this is not the time or the place. So what I would like to say is that they were one of the most important reasons that I fought so hard for Bart's recovery. My children deserve their dad. They love him and they need him. There were so many times that it was their sweet little faces, happy or sad, dirty or clean, that kept me going. They motivate and encourage me in so many ways that they will never know.

So from the bottom of my heart, I want to thank you. You all are truly special people, instrumental in not only ensuring that our family stay intact, but that we recover much stronger than when we began this struggle. Each of you is a very special gift in our lives and we love you. Also, to those of you who have had us in your prayers, we thank you. And just so you know, prayer works. Don't ever stop.

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Stress and Depression...

Chapter 1 **FROM ME TO YOU**

I share my story with you as the caregiver of someone who suffered a nervous breakdown while battling depression in the hopes of providing you with a source of encouragement when you find yourself in a difficult time. You are not alone. You are not the first to be in this position, and you won't be the last. When we were struggling through this ordeal, I earnestly desired to seek out caregivers of similar situations. There were those who had shared their story of suffering depression and the horrors that entailed, but there were no accounts from any caregivers—no outlines for those trying to help a loved one in trouble. It is because of this that I share with you the things that I did for my husband, Bart. I am in no way an expert on depression and do not claim to be. I am simply a wife and mother who found herself in a tough situation. I found myself relying on prayer, instinct, support of loved ones, and my love for Bart. I love Bart, and I love my children. They are my heart and soul, and they are worth it. Because you have those in your life who mean the same to you, I hope that this account gives you courage, hope, and support.

Depression is a mean disease that knows no boundaries. Regardless of what may be the culprit, the variable of stress is always involved. Now I could go on and on about how I believe that a healthy lifestyle which is centered on maintaining a balance in our mind, body, and spirit is crucial as a defense for depression. This is an excellent idea as a preventative measure, but I must emphasize **preventative**. It is a completely different ballgame when depression strikes. Survival becomes the game plan and healthy lifestyle is out the window, temporarily.

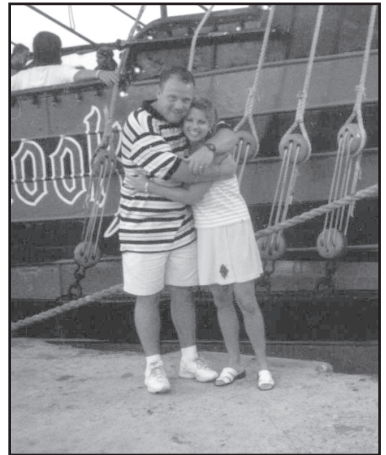
Some of the things that I learned while experiencing this time with Bart I would like to share with you now.

- During a time like this, I think growth is inevitable. I found it best to not only accept it, but embrace it.
- Our attitude is just as important at a time of crisis as it is on a daily basis. It is what dictates progression.
- Sometimes where we find ourselves is not at all where we intended to land.

... *battleground for faith*

- Things aren't always what they appear to be.
- You have a choice. The options aren't always what you would prefer, but you do have a choice.
- To be fair means to be fair to you as well. I am not referring to sacrifices made to care for your loved one. If this is your spouse, this is a commitment that you made in your vows. I am referring to those things which deal with you preserving your self-respect. I am not speaking of all health conditions or types of abuse. I am referring to depression only, and a depressed person still knows right from wrong. You have to remember that in order for your loved one to heal and your relationship to survive, you must command the respect for yourself that you show to others. This includes your loved one. Sacrifice for another does not mean that you are to eliminate your values and the respect that you deserve. This is what you pull from in order to help another. Don't lose yourself and who you are to this situation too. This isn't helping your loved one. At a time like this, you can't afford to become a casualty. Taking care of you is essential to providing the best care for others. Think of this in terms of boundaries. They are necessary in order to develop healthy relationships, and to sacrifice essentials such as boundaries sets up a scenario for future problems. I believe in boundaries. And for me at this time I knew that I didn't want to be back in this position again. I was willing to learn what I needed to learn, and boundaries would help to preserve what we had and completely heal in the process.
- Trust yourself. Do the best you can with what you have. Make your decision and don't look back.

When Bart and I married, we committed to each other wholeheartedly, without reservation. We have often talked about this and how we both felt that we were made for each other. This does not mean that we take our relationship for granted. In fact, it is quite the opposite. We hold our relationship in high regard with supreme priority. We are best friends who hold the greatest respect for each other. Are we perfect? Oh no. Not even close. We are, however, perfect for each other because we want to be. We intend to be.



Our honeymoon in Cancun

Loving Bart is not work. Life is work. For us marriage is the united front we use to face life. Some of the aspects upon which our relationship is based are honesty, trust, and communication. As a result, when Bart crashed, each of these aspects of our relationship were truly tested, which rocked the very core of our relation-

Stress and Depression...

ship. Fortunately, we are both tenaciously loyal and determined or the outcome of this situation could have occurred so differently.

For me, being the caregiver to one suffering from depression brought about so many emotions, and I found that I was not at liberty to express them in Bart's presence because of how fragile his condition had become. An analogy that I would use to describe this time would be a slot machine. When the handle is pulled, the emotions would be spinning and often blur together. When the spinning stopped, the emotion on which the wheel stopped was the emotion that was expressed. Otherwise, the emotions were constantly swirling. I had no control of when the wheel started or stopped. A few of the most prominent emotions that I experienced in large proportions were the following.

Loneliness

Loneliness was apparent for me soon after Bart crashed. This was the first time in our relationship that it felt that Bart and I were not united in dealing with life's challenges. I actually found myself having to function as a single parent because Bart was simply unable to perform in that capacity. He required more attention and care than our three small children. This was a time when I needed him so desperately. I needed his help, his support, and his strength. I needed Bart.

Hurt

Bart's crash not only hurt him, but it hurt me too. It hurt to my very core to see him struggle with the simplest of routine tasks. It hurt to see him cry. It hurt to not be able to cry in front of him because of how it would affect him. It hurt to know that he was so scared and so hurt and I couldn't change it. It hurt to see him so fragile.

Fear

I was scared. One of my biggest fears is something happening to Bart. I would lose my best friend and be left to raise our children alone. I don't ever allow myself to think of this because it terrifies me. When he crashed, this was thrown right in my face. This fear was so closely a reality and I knew it. But with that being said, I didn't focus on it. What I did focus on was getting Bart as far away from that as possible. Everything that I did was in that direction. I was so scared that if he didn't move forward regardless of how slow, we were in danger. From the time that I would wake Bart in the morning until we would go to bed at night, I would not allow him to go back to bed. I know this sounds harsh, but he rested in the recliner if he needed to rest, and actually he preferred to lie on his stomach

... battleground for faith

on the floor in his office. I was just afraid that if he ever allowed himself to go back to bed, that he would never get up. For me, Bart going to bed in this state would be the beginning of the end.

Sadness

I was so sad. The reality that we really have no idea what tomorrow holds was so prevalent. It felt as if our whole world had been turned upside down, and I had no idea if Bart and I would ever be the same.

Anger

I had so much anger. I was angry because at this point in time, it appeared that Bart was being dishonest with me and that he just continued to do so. I was angry with all of the confusion related to his business. I was angry that this confusion had now become my problem.

Love

Throughout it all, I loved Bart. I loved us and what we had. I wanted so badly for it to be ok. I loved our family, and I was determined to see this through. At times I would see glimpses of the Bart that I knew and loved. Those were encouraging and they helped. I would like to say that Bart is free of depression, never to deal with it again, but we all know that that is untrue and unrealistic. Bart no longer suffers with depression at that magnitude; he does, however, manage life as we all should—one day at a time. He is not a depressed person. He is a better person, a stronger person for enduring this challenge and seeing it through. With it he has allowed himself the opportunity to grow as only one can when challenges arise. Sometimes we must fall to the bottom so that we may place both feet firmly beneath our self and spring upward. Bart has done it. He is soaring upward. With all that this condition brought to his life, I think that he would quickly tell you that it was a blessing, and he chooses to see it that way. Not only is he stronger and more confident, we are stronger as a couple.

I admire him and I am so very proud of him. He could have allowed this situation to become prolonged and overtake him completely. He didn't. He did have help. I have always said that you can only help someone as much as they will help themselves. Bart had the desire. It was buried deep within, but it was there, and that is what made the difference.