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Mark and Patricia dedicate their book to their partners who supported them over the past thirty years. What the Rosers accomplished was possible because their Senders gave and prayed. Their story is one story of God's love at work in our world.

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Chapter One
Is This a Trap?
(Mark)

Nightfall descends upon the small border town of Beitbridge as we cross the Limpopo River. Town lights soon give way to a fuller darkness with only a pale moon leading us into the African bush.

We reach a fork in the road, and a large sign with reflective material points in two different directions:

Harare 560 Kilometers >

< Bulawayo 320 Kilometers

I take the road to Bulawayo.

Thirty minutes later, the blackness has settled overhead like a domed roof with misty floating stars, and the blackness runs the entire circumference of the sky in every direction. I feel the deep darkness of an African night pressing in all around me, and I wrestle with my decision.

Should we have spent the night at the border in Beitbridge?

I didn't want to take our luggage off the roof rack and risk possible theft or pay for a hotel.

But it would have been the safer option!

Hundreds of armed Ndebele dissidents roam this area. A report of murdered missionaries flash before me like Breaking News: "The victims, eight British, Elim missionaries, and their four young children, were beyond help, with ax wounds scarring their bodies, bayonet thrusts deep in their backs, and skulls crushed by

knobkerries. They had all been foully abused. All but one of the four women had been raped, and left semi-naked on the grass.”

I glance sideways at Pat’s uneasy face and then through the rear view mirror at our infant girl and three year old boy, both peacefully sleeping in the back of our station wagon.

My dreadful thoughts are left unspoken, as if uttering them might release hateful powers against us.

Two hours into our drive, my headlights reveal a wooden blockade straight-ahead. I brake hard.

A sign next to the makeshift roadblock says, “Detour 3 Kilometers.” The handwritten sign points left off the road into the murky bush.

Pat doesn’t say anything but she squirms in her chair and looks down at the floor.

What choice do we have?

“Patricia, why don’t you read to me from the Psalms? The glove compartment light will come on when you open it.”

Off the paved road, we roll onto a very rough dirt road, cut right into the bush and less than the width of two cars. My headlights are on bright, but I can hardly see the path ahead of us; everything on either side of this makeshift road is black and shrouded.

We bump along only able to go ten kilometers an hour.

Is this a trap? I mustn’t utter such a thing.

The shadowy outline of bushes and trees give the impression of arms and legs, moving and reaching out to grab us.

The detour goes on and on and the night feels ever darker while Pat reads louder from the Psalms.

David prayed that he not fall into the hands of sinful men, that his precious life be spared. I force myself to focus on what she's reading; the Psalmist's words speak to our stressful circumstances.

“When they went from one nation to another, From one kingdom to another people, He permitted no one to do them wrong...Saying, “Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm” (Psalm 105:13-15).

While the light from the glove compartment contends with the darkness, the vibration of predators --- hiding, waiting, and moving through the dead of an African night pursue us in my thoughts.

Jostling from side to side, I look at my kilometer gauge on four; this detour should've ended.

Who put that sign up?

Our hatchback POPS open all of a sudden.

Chapter Two
Goodbye to Love Ones
(Pat)

We lurch forward when Mark brings the car to an abrupt halt.

Rushing in all around me, sending shivers up my spine, is the cool outside air and the faint pulsating sound of insects, chiming and ticking, a strange nocturnal hum of an unlocked African night.

Then stillness...

How on earth did our backdoor open?

With wild eyes, Mark gawks at it while a palpable question hangs in the chilly air: Who will get out and shut the door?

Mark engages the clutch in neutral and turns to me ~ *Will you?*

I answer back with my most incredulous look ~ *Mark!*

Johnathan and Elesha stay asleep in the back, but I have never been so awake; all my senses remain alert amidst the surrounding darkness.

Still, we barter no words.

Mark yanks the emergency brake up, and as quick as anyone ever has - flies out of the car, shutting the door, jumping back in, and pulling away ~ all in one continuous motion.

Past midnight, we make it to Bulawayo's broad, deserted streets; wide enough, they brag, to turn a team of oxen around. Under the street lights, we find a working phone booth to call Bryan Garde. He had offered to put us up for the night on our way to Harare.

Near the phone booth, staring at us from shop windows are two life-size manikins, styled from the 1950s with bright red lips and eyeliner. It's as if that detour through the bush took us back in time to our parent's generation.

I don't care if we went through a wormhole. I squeal, "It looks like civilization to me!" I bend down and kiss the sidewalk.

Mark gives me a tired look, and our kids sleep-on, oblivious to it all.

Brian arrives and we follow him to his house where a bed awaits us.

In the morning, Brian says, "It's not advisable to drive here at night. Mugabe has tried to crush the Matabele, but there are still many armed dissidents since the time you guys went back to America."

His wife, Becky, advises, "You should get an early start for Harare."

After breakfast, we drive 431 kilometers in the daylight, arriving in Harare as the sun is setting. We find our way to #47 North Avenue, the home of the Madekufambas. We haven't seen them in five years.

Well, I take that back.

I saw Augustine two years ago. Impressed to watch the 700 Club, I caught a three-minute clip from Billy Graham's Conference in Amsterdam. The camera crew filmed Augustine sharing Christ with a homeless man. I was flabbergasted. In a letter, Augustine told Mark that he did, in fact, attend the conference.

Augustine and Thandie meet us at the door with a big hug and helping hands with our luggage.

"When we last saw you, you were newlyweds," Augustine says.

"And now look, you have two children," Thandie adds.

Over cups of hot tea, we talk for two hours while Wadzi, their daughter, a curious five-year-old, waits on pins and needles to share her room.

Her room has a bunk bed; she has the top and Johnathan the bottom; she instantly takes to him, shouting his name, John'a-ton, while climbing up and down the bunk-bed ladder. He smiles at her spontaneous performance.

We are delighted that her room also fits a double bed for us and a cot for Elesha. Five of us in a room is not bad when you've been cramped on a plane and in a car for the better part of a week.

Before I get into bed, I grab my handkerchief from my purse. It has eye shadow and lipstick markings in its evanescent folds, reminding me of how we said goodbye a week ago to our families and friends.

Twenty-five in all saw us off at Greater Cincinnati Airport:

"We love you!"

"We're going miss you!"

"Write to us when you get there."

"We will. It will take us at least a week to get to Harare."

"Elesha, won't remember her grandparents."

"Johnathan will."

"You take care of one another - be safe."

"We will. We love you..."

How do you say goodbye to loved ones, when you don't know when you will see them again?

I had wiped the tears from my face with my handkerchief as we boarded our plane and began our journey back to Zimbabwe.

When I last made this trip, I was single, and they still called Harare by its English name, Salisbury.

Chapter Three
A Far Away Land
5 ½ Years Earlier
(Mark)

My British Airways flight descends from above the suburbs of Salisbury. The rich, deep blue of many in-ground swimming pools catch my eyes.

Such unexpected luxury...

It is October 25, 1980.

Yesterday, I boarded a Boeing 747 out of Cincinnati, knowing little about my destination, except that a long, brutal war had just ended in Zimbabwe. Formerly called Rhodesia, it is the newest independent nation in southern Africa, named after ancient stone ruins; proof of an advanced culture that once thrived in this area, centuries before white men penetrated the interior and uttered the name of Jesus in the heart of the Dark Continent.

I step onto the noonday tarmac and heat rises from under my feet. I inhale asphalt vapors ascending from the pavement, and there is a slight haze in the air; above me clear-blue skies and a bright sun; straight ahead of me a small, two-story, concrete building. Flanking the far side of the landing strip is a large stretch of open savannah in which I expect to see a lion or elephant roaming.

Nothing like the airports I left behind in London and New York.

I pass a crowded departure lounge of white Rhodesians, anxious to leave; a mass exodus is in full swing, confirming what I read in a London newspaper that the white population has plummeted from 250,000 to less than 100,000.

I present my passport like an arriving ambassador.

At customs, an African man in a dark blue uniform with embroidered patches on both shoulders opens my luggage and smiles when he sees my Bible and bundles of Gospel tracts.

He mumbles a passing joke to an associate who chuckles.

“Hey,” I rejoin, “Let me leave you a tract to read.”

He accepts it and waves me on. A surge of adrenaline propels me forward, and a sensation hits me of being in another world.

Ron Dick, a missionary who invited me to Africa, happily greets me and leads me outside. His new Japanese station wagon stands out in the parking lot. Old cars fill the rest of the spaces. *It's like an antique automobile show.* They're the result of many years of sanctions imposed by the West because Rhodesia denied black Zimbabweans the right to vote.

Along the way Ron briefs me: “You'll be staying with Les Stone. He lives near the Chapel in Mabelreign. He's a school teacher.”

All the building and houses we pass have walls and metal gates.

When we arrive at #12 Charles Drive, Ron does a friendly two-hoot. A middle-aged black man quickly appears from behind the gate, wearing an apron over a t-shirt and short khaki trousers with no shoes. He opens the gate for us with a broad smile, and we pull behind the house and park.

The back door is a Dutch-split, the top half open and the bottom part closed. The bottom then swings open and a white man emerges. He is in his thirties, Irish-looking with thick, reddish, well-kept hair. His distinguished manner, however, makes him seem more English as he walks toward us with a slight limp. He

clenches a pipe in his mouth and greets Ron, saying something also in another language to the African man who hurries to grab my bags. As he talks between puffs, he somehow keeps the pipe in his mouth, steadying it with his right hand and waiting for Ron to introduce me, which Ron does.

With his left hand he removes his pipe, and shakes my hand firmly, inquiring, "I hope you had a pleasant flight?"

Les leads us through his one-story farm house, and says, "Make yourself at home." Then noticing I'm fading, he adds, "Get some rest. We can talk later."

When in bed, I discover - I'm not alone: looking down at me from the wall is a hairy, black spider, the size of my fist.

I'm exhausted but there is no way I can sleep with him in the room. The creature evokes a book, which my parents had somehow acquired: torn, thick pages with colorful drawings of African flesh-eating, army ants. "They devour everything in their path, leaving mere bones in their wake." Fearing that these killer ants might make their way to America, floating on leaves, I promised myself, "Africa is the last place on earth I'll go!"

But here I am now, a big boy. I mustn't cry out for Les. I'll face this air-breathing, eight-legged demon, alone, venomous or not.

Marching into the kitchen, I grab a broom and fight my first battle in Africa, short but intense, ending with legs and body sprawled all over the floor - his, not mine.

I fall into a desperate sleep.

Before the sun is up, I'm awake. In the dark my feet hit the cool concrete floor: ample confirmation, I'm not dreaming.

I'm really in Africa.

I run my hand along the wall, hurriedly, hoping not to touch anything except the light switch. And so my first day in Africa begins with me watching out for big spiders on walls.

Fried eggs, tea, and toast - then Les drops me off at Alfred Beit Primary School. Called Right of Entry, it amazes me that there is compulsory religious instruction during school hours. I'm teaching the Bible in public schools when in American schools it's outlawed. I teach the inquisitive ten to twelve-year-olds who ask me questions about dinosaurs and evolution.

In the afternoon, I do a Scripture Union lesson. This is a volunteer group after school hours for those interested in studying the Bible.

The next day, I teach adults at the Zimbabwe Assembly of God Training Institute. I met the founder, Ezekiel Guti, in Cincinnati and took him to dinner after he spoke at Faith Fellowship. Ezekiel had heard about a Lake of Fire judgment and came to the city looking for someone who could explain the way of salvation. In 1960, he started a church under a gum tree. Since then, he has won many thousands to Christ and started hundreds of churches.

On the way home, I stop by the Post Office to get an aerogram. I need to write my parents and let them know I've arrived safely.

That evening I sit to write but my heart goes out to Pat Donohue. We had met at Xavier University and became more than friends, enjoying a budding romance of hand holding and tender kisses.

However, two months before I left for Zimbabwe, I did not want to mislead her and failed to invite her to my sister Rose's wedding. Then a month before I left, I told her why I was distant toward her. We were at a Young Adult weekend at Hueston Woods, a camping ground near Cincinnati, in the children's play area. We were both leaning on a metal roundabout as storm clouds gathered strength in the distant sky and moved in our direction. The bright flashes of

lightning and rumbling thunder increased in intensity as I shared my deepest misgivings.

“I don’t know if I’ll marry. It seems that living a single life will be better since I’m going to Africa!”

I had read Paul’s advice to the Corinthians too many times: a strong case for living a single, un-distracted life for Christ. My Catholic upbringing also told me that celibacy is the rule for anyone serious about serving God.

After a reflective moment, Pat replied, “I do not expect to own a house in the suburbs and a dog in the yard.”

Her upbringing made marriage a sober thought for her too.

By now, the gathering storm was breathtaking. Again and again, chain lightning laid bare the field all around us and illuminated our earnest facial expressions.

“I feel there is not much time left; so many troubles in this world.” I had to have my say. “Couples trying to please one another instead of the Lord. Marriage is a calling. It’s for life!”

Long rumbles of thunder followed the lightening as though the heavens groaned in their own speech. And as if having waited long enough for us to finish, the rain began to pour, and we made a run for my car. We continued to talk, and I told Pat that I couldn’t commit to her. I knew it hurt her and I felt terrible, but I was in leaving mode - leaving my family, and everything I’d ever known.

Merely a week ago, the evening before I left, Pat came to my parent’s house where I stayed and left me a note. It had the sweetest words of what our *friendship* had meant to her.

Peering into her soul, tears moistened her beautiful brown eyes. Her tender display of feelings for me left me speechless. But like a

soldier on the eve of his deployment, I blurted, “I’m going to miss you too.”

Without further ado, she kissed me on the cheek and made her way from my parents’ porch to her yellow Volkswagen Beetle.

Silently, I watched her get in, start the engine, and drive up the street and out of my sight.

Now I don’t know if I’ll ever be with her again; if it’ll ever be the same between us, or if ever I will know such love.

Sitting at the table, I write, “Dear Pat, I have arrived safely in Africa. I hope that you are well. Please write me. I want to tell you about my first couple of days...”

My pen pours onto paper my first discoveries in Africa. Four pages later my soul has rid itself of its loneliness and my lingering guilt. If I will post my letter tomorrow, it will take two weeks to cross the ocean. The earliest I might hear back from Pat will be a month.

Chapter Four **On My Own Again**

(Pat)

I say goodbye to Mark on his parent's porch and drive autopilot back to my apartment in Clifton, stomach empty, mind whirling --- his eyes pools of genuine kindness, and his firm hands, so warm and protective, so gentle yet manly, brought me a sense of security.

But now, I'm on my own again.

Growing up, I often felt on my own. My dad had visiting rights and picked me up on Sundays; dinner at one of his sisters, swimming, or watching him paint in the park. But at the end of the day, he pulled to the curb, and I dutifully leaned over to kiss my dad goodbye, and a cold, hollow independence engulfed me.

As I pull up to my apartment, my headlights expose a shrub. Its roots were turned upside down - like the torn roots of my heart. A storm had unearthed them and exposed them to the elements. I'm in touch with raw sorrow over *what could have been*. A mangled tubular stem of hurt, a love lost, imagining the prized joy that is not mine.

A desire to serve God captured Mark's heart and he pruned our blossoms before he said a final goodbye.

Dragging my feet up the steps, I sigh when I see the light-on inside.

I'd really just like to be alone.

But splitting the rent is an answer for Mary Moylan and I, since my income is limited doing substitute teaching, and she is finishing her master's degree.

Gently closing the door, the keys rattle, and from around the corner Mary voices the dreaded question, “What happened with Mark?”

Entering the lounge, I state the fact: “I said goodbye to him!”

“Were, you, um, in love?”

I give into the moment, plopping onto the sofa, reflecting her way: “Well, he loves God. It’s like he’s always saying, ‘Just give it all out while there’s time cause you’ll never run out of God’s love.’ Yea, he won my heart.”

I wasn’t looking for a guy. They’d have to put God’s purposes first; keep him in the center of our relationship. I was determined to wait.

“Do you think it’s over?”

“A month ago at the Young Adult Weekend, he said he couldn’t commit to me, not with his going to Africa. So it looks that way.”

At Hueston Woods the next day, Mark and I went in opposite directions. He decided to hike and I chose to sail. I succumbed to lying across the deck of the boat. The summer day took hold of me, as water rushed beneath the boat, and the sun baked me. Matt, another member of the Young Adult group and who also chose sailing, experimented with the rudder; water occasionally splashed me as he cut a path through the lake. A floating sensation carried me along; then the sail began to flap and the boom swayed from one side to the other; my heart did too, swaying back and forth --- I took hold of Mark, and now, I’ve let go of him.

After a moment, Mary breaks the silence: “You spent a lot of time with Mark. Um, I mean, how long ago did you guys meet?”

“Around eighteen months ago - well, I heard him before I actually met him. You know his deep voice resonates like a radio broadcaster.”

Just thinking of his confident tone of voice brings warmth to my heart.

“Mark presented a different version of the end of the world than our teacher. He quoted the New Testament to make his point, quite the debater. It’s strange I even met him. The class was full and I put my name on a waiting list. I got in because a few students dropped it.”

I recall sitting at a table in the library across from a friend, Dennis. I looked up and there he was --- on a ladder, changing tube lights. He was wearing black and white checkered restaurant pants, which hung on his narrow hips and gathered around high-top gym shoes. His white t-shirt had an outline of a raccoon’s face, peering down at me, and his very curly, charcoal-black hair was eclipsed by his bright, piercing eyes.

Down the ladder he came and paused at my table. His medium build, olive complexion, and strong facial features made me wonder: is he Jewish or Mediterranean?

Mark whispered, ‘I’m leaving Xavier. That was my *last* class!’ And he asked me, what my plans were.

I told him that was my *only* class at Xavier before I graduate from Edgecliff. Then he disappeared.

When I went down the library steps, there he was again. He seemed to want to talk, so I slowed down midway, landing against the rail at the bottom. He grinned when I stopped, revealing a happy white smile, and his warm inquisitive eyes locked me-in, but his eyes also revealed a shade of shyness when he asked me about Dennis.

Mary ends my reminiscing, saying, “Without you inviting him to Faith Fellowship Church, he wouldn’t be in Africa now. Maybe Africa is why God had you meet him.”

“Yea, Mark asked me where I went to church. He said something like, ‘Oh is that also where your boyfriend goes to church?’

I told him, ‘Dennis is not my boyfriend but my girlfriend’s fiancé.’”

Wondering if he was showing interest in me, I did what any sensible girl would do. I invited him to church.

Mary laughs, saying. “It takes guys awhile to figure things out.”

My heart is sore, and solitude, like an old friend, summons me.

“Goodnight, Mary, a school may call me in the morning to sub.”

The next morning, Mary is out the door early, but no subbing today.

A call in the afternoon brings me a six-week post. I will sub for an expecting mother on maternity leave.

Two weeks later, a letter with exotic stamps is in the mailbox. It’s from Mark --- a long letter about the new people he has met.

He misses me. What a pleasant surprise.

Oh, how I have missed you too.

Chapter Five
End of the World Love
(Mark)

“**Let me leave you** with a gospel tract. It tells you more about how Jesus loves you, and how he died to save you.”

“Thank you, sir. But is it free?” he asks when I hand him the tract.

“Yes, absolutely free. You see that A-frame building over there. It’s the Mabelreign Chapel. It is where we meet for church. Please join us at 10am on Sunday.”

The man begins reading the tract, and I make my way toward a middle-aged lady in a maid’s uniform, waiting at the bus stop...

I talk with Africans on the street and in the markets. They’re happy to talk, which makes approaching them easy. They do seem, however, unaccustomed to white strangers engaging them.

On Sunday, an African family takes me up on my invitation. They arrive at church as we are singing, squeezing into a row in the back. They are the only black people in the service, and I notice a few heads turn and eyebrows rise.

When the service ends, I’m told, “There are Shona services here in the afternoon.”

“But they’re fluent in English.”

“Yes, but it’s best for the locals if they attend services in their native language. We employ an African pastor who conducts the afternoon Shona services for them.”

I am alarmed to find racial discrimination where I least expect it - in the Chapel - like finding a big spider on my bedroom wall.

Granted Mabelreign was a white's only suburb six months ago, and the third generation settlers are worried about the new government. They've been told for decades, "We're fighting for Western civilization, against communism and anarchy."

Last week, a white guy pointed out the results of majority rule: Angola and Mozambique - civil wars, Zambia and Malawi - feeble economies. He promptly rested his case with the self-assurance of a D.A. giving his closing argument. A lady also told me, "Blacks can't govern themselves." She searched my face for a response like an adult helping a child understand why a pet must be put down.

I grab a local newspaper and an article in the *Herald* quotes the president, Robert Mugabe saying, "I see Jesus in the face of a freedom fighter." But whites see death: slaughtered families in their compounds at night, and ambushed friends on the road in broad daylight. In the article, Mugabe also speaks of reconciliation. "You've nothing to fear," he tells the whites. "You should stay if you wish to help build the country."

Back at the Chapel, I ask a missionary, "What do you think of Mugabe's talk of reconciliation?"

"God gave me a verse," he says, "from my Bible reading about Mugabe: 'His talk is smooth as butter, yet war is in his heart; his words are more soothing than oil, yet they are drawn swords'" (Psalm 55:21 NIV).

I hope that he's got the wrong verse as I tell myself, "What better way to help build the country than sharing Jesus?"

My day of street-witnessing fades in the afternoon shadows. The sun sets early in Zimbabwe, 6pm, and it gets dark fast.

I eat my dinner alone and stretch out on my single bed to read. Loneliness engulfs me like the emptiness I had felt before I took Pat up on her invitation to visit Faith Fellowship.

I had pulled into the church's hilltop property and was greeted by a spectacular view of the city lights, sparkling like strings of LED's on the hills of Cincinnati as they gradually slop downward to the banks of the Ohio River. The lights were more than just lights. They told me, "There are others like you who believe in Christ the way you do."

How I miss those lights and oh, how I miss Pat...

I first set eyes on her in a class at Xavier University. Outside, birds sang and flowers bloomed; it was a warm spring day, 1978.

This very pretty brunette gracefully glided into a chair, three rows to my left. Her attractive profile, delicate facial features, and wavy curls caught my attention; sunlight, pouring in the windows, highlighted a hint of red in her hair.

It might have been love at first sight if I was looking for a wife. But no, I was consumed with the world's impending destruction! And as if to remind me why I was there, Dr. Callen appeared from behind his desk, announcing to a jam-packed classroom, "Welcome to the End of the World!"

Dr. Callen persuaded the Theology Department to offer the hot subject after a student had hounded him with questions about the End. That student was me!

A much grander subject than political science, my major, had apprehended me.

"People have always thought that the world would soon end," Dr. Callen said. "Jesus told his disciples the world would end in their lifetime!"

He slowly paced the worn tile floor and wrote Luke 9:27 on the blackboard. ‘There are some standing here who will not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God.’”

I couldn’t listen to Jesus’ words being twisted. My mind raced and my hand shot up as if propelled by an involuntary reflex.

“Dr. Callen,” I countered, “Luke emphatically states in the next verse, ‘Now it came to *pass* about eight days after these sayings that he took Peter, James, and John up on the mountain.’ Jesus’ transfiguration filled his promise of some of them seeing the Kingdom come. And Peter connects his experience with the Second Coming when he writes, ‘For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you *the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty... with Him on the holy mountain’” (2 Peter 1:16-18).

Our sparring continued after the bell rang, ending our first class.

Dr. Callen encouraged dialogue and compared to other teachers, he was conservative. When I told him a professor taught that Jesus did not rise from the dead, he said, “I wouldn’t go that far.”

I was, however, the student who protested, “All day long they tear my Bible up, and all night long I put it back together.”

Then it happened, toward the middle of the semester, none other than the brown-eyed beauty stayed after class to listen to our debate. Turning to her, inquisitively, Dr. Callen asked point blank, “Umm, Patricia Donohoue who do you agree with, Mark or me?”

“Well, I agree with Mark because his position lines up with the Scriptures!” she disclosed.

Wow, that was gutsy! The other students had avoided our debate. I scanned Dr. Callen’s surprised face, feeling as if I had just converted the whole campus; then at Patricia --- our eyes meet.

She smiled at me with pure sweetness. My pious guard melted like butter in a microwave, fried by this outspoken, Irish wildflower, who not only believed her Bible but agreed with --- with --- me.

The first to side with me since becoming a born again-er!

After a few visits to the Young Adult Group, a pleasant Friday evening routine developed. I would pick Pat up for the meetings and afterward we would share our passion for chocolate and ice cream. When Pat wanted to paint her efficiency apartment, I helped her brush paint on the ceilings. The owner had insisted on enamel-based paint for durability and our eyes watered, but I didn't mind. I was fond of this spiritually minded girl who was even cuter when she was tearful.

Now my first month apart from her has settled my big question - I'm not called to a single life. What's more, I can't stand the thought of Pat marrying anyone else.

Tonight, I sit at my desk and my friendly letters to her become love letters. All it takes re-reading a sentence from her first letter to me: "I enjoy," she wrote, "reading the tender things you say to me."

So I tell her in more endearing terms, far better than in person that I love her. To properly express my love, I quote verses from the Song of Solomon, which is now my favorite book in the Bible – more so than John's Revelation.

I will post my letter tomorrow!

Chapter Six
Jesus Bore My Shame
(Pat)

At Christmas time, my mom visits Cincinnati. She's staying with her friend, Ruth, who lives near the university.

I park between the gas lights that line the street. Ruth's house is a solid German design, two stories with an attic. Mom meets me on the porch; her soft little peck on the lips means a lot.

It's been a year and a half since I've seen her.

My hardworking, dedicated mother had made a big, brave leap at age fifty-one to begin her life again in a new city.

"Oh, you're in jeans, a liberated woman." She never liked slacks and always carried a unique, stylish beauty. "Hmmm, you look slimmer?"

"I walk a lot - everyone in San Francisco walks," her eyes sparkling.

Mom is happy there!

Inside we settle around a cozy kitchen table.

"I've made you lunch?" Mother stands to open the fridge...

I somersault back to when I was three. In front of the fridge, my parents held one another in a confused, tangled embrace. "We won't have enough," Dad said with a tearful face. I had never seen him cry. He took serious his role as a provider, and things had looked up: a house in the suburbs and a polished, blue Plymouth, but his welding job at General Motors was made redundant.

Dad got a new job, which put food on our table, but mom was unhappy. The fabric of their relationship — Catholicism, family, art, music — was like torn, fragmented fibers.

If only I had known how to make mom happy. At age three, my little heart broke like shattered china on hard cold floors.

The microwave bell rings, and mom sets a bowl of steaming soup in front of me on Ruth's tablecloth: "A new recipe, black bean soup."

Stacked against Ruth's kitchen wall is a long thin Delta box.

"Mother, what's the box about?"

"Oh, that's for my bicycle. I hope to take it on the plane as luggage."

Boxes, lamps, and loose toys, I recall; all sandwiched around Mary Margret, Steve, and I in the backseat of Uncle Ted's station wagon. Having lost our house, he helped us move into government housing. Our welcome to the subsidized neighborhood in English Woods was the stealing of our lawn furniture. "My doll's bed!" I cried as Dad dismantled it to make a sign: "Keep off the grass!" My sobs made no difference. My father's world was under siege.

A bread roll joins my soup.

"Thanks, Mother. Aren't you eating?"

"I ate earlier; just a cup of coffee for me."

The smell of her coffee brewing takes me back to a coffee cup half empty that rested in a saucer on the kitchen table. "Good, he left," Mother had mumbled. "We're incompatible!"

My parent's roller-coaster marriage ended as abruptly as a theme-park ride, finishing its last descent and letting the passengers out. After that day, I never saw them together again.

Mother scoots her long bicycle box with her foot along Ruth's kitchen wall as if it is in the way.

"When I check-in my box, they'll think I'm a vagabond woman," she says, shrugging her shoulders and shaking her head.

"Mother, vagabonds don't fly and work for top physicians," I say with a smile but I want to cry.

I was four when the shattering of my world reached a crescendo. An ambulance arrived, sirens blaring and paramedics racing out of my house with someone on a stretcher. I ran out of my girlfriend Debbie's house two doors down, screaming, "Mother!"

She survived an overdose of sleeping pills. Somehow, she got back on her feet.

"Mother, you're a California Girl - you don't want to be on a bus. It will be great to have your bike there on Saturdays!"

After her car accident, Mother always used public transport, two buses to work and two back home. My older sister, Mary Margret (MM), and I cooked and cleaned. My brother, Steve, did the garbage and yard. We all endured constant financial stress: broken furniture, old clothes, and because we had no car, my routine humiliation of transporting groceries in a store cart fifteen blocks home.

Mother joins me with her coffee, informing me, "I'm going with Ruth on Christmas Eve to Midnight Mass."

Shame followed Mother as a divorcee, even into the church; she was denied communion; head bent down, her tears fell from her lovely cheeks as we knelt in our pew.

The racial riots in the Sixties moved us out of subsidized housing to a new school midway through third grade. My new teacher announced my welcome: “She comes from that part of town we talked about last week!” The heat of embarrassment crept up my décolletage and onto my cheeks. Shame had somehow followed me across town.

We talk for an hour about her life in San Francisco and my substitute teaching.

“Mother, I better make a move.”

A long hug and then I’m in my car, pulling into the nearest driveway to reverse. I wave to Mom again who watches me from the door.

My childhood pain drove my search for meaning. At age ten, a bright spot appeared like the morning star - a happily married couple did my catechism class and they opened to me a new world about God. I was enthralled by Jesus’ love for the poor, and identified with Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Their journey through the wilderness to a land of promise gave me hope during my passage through adolescence.

My teen years, I was not into partying. Life was too serious for me. I was a popular girl, however, President of my Freshman Class. That year my high school had its first Spiritual Day: Pro-lifers and other speakers. It was the *Jesus Freaks* that got my attention. These college kids told how Jesus *saved* them, defining salvation as a gift. They claimed God changed their self-centered way of living, and they now followed his teachings. Well, I had not heard this before.

Weeks later, I was at a school dance, when a guy said, “There’s a prayer meeting down the street - would you like to go?”

I found myself in a house, wall to wall with people, and a Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr: singing, arms lifted, and prayers. It was the first time I heard people talk to God in an intimate way.

Words came to me: “All the pain of your early years will work for your good.” Spoken so tenderly, it was as if God was in pursuit of me! I thought, this passing moment might not come again, and said with ease, “Yes, my Jesus, I give you my life!”

I was fourteen.

When I started at college, I tried to figure out my future. I even lived in a Christian community; we shared a common purse. Half the household members were African America, and I saw how racial bias works in our society. I identified with their plight and I promised, “God, I’m available if you choose to use me to bring racial healing.”

Pulling my car to the mailbox, I find another sky-blue arogram from Mark. I catch myself giggling; his recent letters assure me of his love.