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A Newsletter of The Amy Foundation



Birthday Begins Year of Unexpected Gifts

By: Rachel Coleman

On my 40th birthday, I woke up disabled. I limped to the kitchen, my right foot dragging along the carpet at every step and attempted to eat breakfast with a right arm that couldn't grasp the coffee mug. I spent the morning at the emergency room and went home wondering why the pictures of my brain seemed to make all the medical people look so sad.

Within two days I learned I had multiple sclerosis, a disease that essentially unravels and erodes the insulation on a person's nerves. Messages don't make it from the brain to the arm saying: "Hey, the mouth would like a sip of hot coffee! Pick up the mug, already!" The signal dies en route.

One year later, I can say this disease is one of the best things that ever happened in my life. It was an unexpected and excellent birthday present from God.

Denial? Delusion? Not at all. Just like all unexpected life trials people encounter, there's a real down side to having MS — shots, fatigue, discouragement, uncertainty about the future. Limping. But compared to what I received during this

wondrous 41st year of life, the difficulties turned out light and temporary.

This year was an endless parade of gifts, some spectacularly dramatic, others subtle and initially easy to overlook. The truths I learned are worth noting because God offers all of us the same blessings, whether they come in the form of MS, diabetes, job layoffs or just everyday life. It is a paradox: hardship brings with it glimpses of God's goodness — gifts presented in a simple package.

The first was peace and quiet. Through no choice of my own, I stayed in bed nearly a month to rest my stressed-out, frail body. The life I was accustomed to — an experiment in frenetic, overscheduled, multi-tasking absurdity — came to an abrupt halt. I had to relearn everything: how to walk, how to take a bath, how to eat without spilling food all over myself, how to type. How to be still.

"In quietness and confidence is your strength," the poet-prophet Isaiah observes.

And as the weary prophet Elijah heard, having worn himself to a frazzle proclaiming the reality of God, "after

the earthquake ... and after the fire, a still, small voice."

That's the voice of God, the maker of heaven and earth, rivers, mountains, rain, stingrays, elephants and silkworms. And people. And me.

This was the second gift: a fresh awareness of my created life. Since childhood, I was

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Rachel Coleman lives in Liberal, Kansas, where she and her husband homeschool the three youngest of their eight children. She attended Central Christian College in McPherson, KS, and Trinity College in Deerfield, IL. Rachel has written for the Southwest Times newspaper for 17 years. Her blog, "Out of Print" can be found at www.rachelcoleman.wordpress.com. She won the 2nd place Amy Writing Award in 2009.

Prayer Requests

We believe "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of the Amy Foundation Ministry.

Amy Prayer List:

- Pray for wisdom in selecting our 2010 Amy Writing Award winners based on article submissions received at the end of January.
- That the Internet Syndicate will reach new outlets in 2011 and more people will be able to access these excellent, professionally written columns dealing with today's issues from God's perspective.

Spread the Word!

The Pen & Sword is now published online only. If you or someone you know would like to receive a notice when the next issue is posted, along with a link to the online edition, send your e-mail address to amyfoundtn@aol.com

Pen & Sword

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► Unexpected Gifts, cont'd from p.1

taught God created people, we are made in his image, and he wants to interact with us as individuals. Big truths, easy to ignore.

Yet when something goes really amiss with the body — a bad test result, a failure to function properly — we can't help doing it, poor self-centered humans that we are: we start to think about our lives in terms of origin and eternity. We ask, "What about me?" If I am the result of an accidental set of circumstances some million-odd years ago — and if it is only reasonable that

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the strongest, most excellent, fittest specimens of any kind are destined to survive — then, what's the point of struggling with pain and loss?

Besides not making any sense, the notion that we are accidents of evolution and beholden to no Intelligent Designer is a recipe for utter despair. Contrast this with the Christian belief system that maintains every life has value given by God. A person's worth is not based on looks, talent, productivity, strength or charm, though many of us spend an awful lot of time desperately trying to acquire as much of those qualities as possible. How reassuring to realize that, while my body may fail me, stranded as it is in this fallen, broken world, "the Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; his love endures forever; he will not abandon the work of

his hands," (Psalm 138:8).

The third surprise present: a bone-deep sense of peace and security that wrapped around me when in my weakest and most vulnerable state, waiting for help to change my clothes and comb my hair. Time has not diluted the strength of that childlike faith. It's sturdy; it defies reason and baffles fretful worries. It was given to me and certainly no accomplishment of mine. In normal circumstances, I'm a managing fool, trying to get control of any little old problem that comes along.

With stillness, security and faith, this year's journey offered vibrant, unexpected pleasures, flashes of joy and delight. I became an optimist again; I couldn't help it. The support of neighbors and friends renewed my belief that people are more kind and generous than we realize when life's hassles dull our sense of hope.

I also became my family's most ardent fan. As I watched my parents, husband and children rally to reinvent the household's daily operations, I was humbled and awed. Though not a smoothly-oiled machine, it ran with good humor and shining servanthood.

People often observe that a near-death experience, whether real or perceived, can change the rest of a person's life. When you think you might lose everything that matters, only to learn you have more time after all, it becomes difficult to live carelessly, thoughtlessly, selfishly.

Nobody would choose a chronic disease as a means to celebrate four decades of life. It's not particularly fun to inject mysterious medicines into

your body thrice weekly, aware that even the pharmaceutical company "doesn't know exactly" how the stuff works. Yet this too awakened a sense of wonder in me about how our intricately designed bodies operate. Surely our lives are no accident.

Psalm 139 meditates on the fact that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made," and the Psalmist concludes, "marvelous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well."

After a year filled with birthday presents that arrived in the most unexpected of packages, I've learned to see life that way, too — as a mysterious, wonderful gift only God can give. ◀

Originally published in the September 13, 2009 issue of The Southwest Times in Liberal, Kan., Coleman's article won second place in the 2009 Amy Writing Awards.

To read the article in full, visit our website, www.amy-found.org.

A Writer's Bookshelf

By: Mary Jackson

Many writers seize the opportunity the Internet presents to gain instant exposure. Our electronic culture provides a platform for the written word to reach an untold number of people in seconds.

With the ease we enjoy, good writing still requires the old tools of English usage. "Nobody told all the new computer writers that the essence of writing is rewriting," William Zinsser says in the introduction of the 30th anniversary edition of his book, *On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction* (HarperCollins, 2006). "Just because they're writing fluently doesn't mean they're writing well," he notes.

Zinsser's book, along with two others, are worth owning and studying in our quest to remain students of writing – those committed to producing

quality, not just quantity, content. His book deals with the nuts and bolts of grammar usage, as well as how to handle topics from personal memoirs to business and humorous writing.

To maintain consistency with mainstream news media, also have handy a copy of *The Associated Press Stylebook* (Basic Books, 2009). It is a required reference tool for professional writers, and includes an alphabetical guide to capitalization, abbreviation, spelling, numerals and usage. When questions arise in the rewrite process, a quick flip through this book can make the difference in producing a marketable article editors want to run.

Another must-have writing guide is filled with timeless advice such as, "Omit needless words," "Use the active

voice," and "Put statements in the positive form." William Strunk, Jr. originally penned *The Elements of Style* (Allyn and Bacon, 2000) in 1918. He famously influenced his student E. B. White, one of America's most celebrated writers and authors. Over 50 years ago, White co-authored and published this pocket-size, 85-page book of grammar and stylistic rules, now in its fourth edition. It's filled with basics a writer never outgrows, even in the digital age. In his concluding chapter, White writes: "Full of belief, sustained and elevated by the power of purpose, armed with the rules of grammar, you are ready for exposure." These three books will improve our ability to communicate with wide audience.

Looking
for Writing
Tips on the
Web?

The Write Stuff is a journalism blog by Heath Meriwether, a former news editor and writing coach at City University of New York.

<http://writestuff.journalism.cuny.edu/>

Find famous quotes that tie into your writing at:

www.brainyquote.com
or
www.thinkexist.com

Tips for writing on the Web

www.macloo.com/webwriting/

World Journalism Institute

By: Mary Jackson

A new year means another batch of aspiring Christian journalists filtering through the World Journalism Institute and into newsrooms around the globe.

Over a decade ago, I attended the first WJI with 21 others in Asheville, North Carolina. We spent four weeks under the tutelage of several World magazine writers and editors, along with other seasoned journalists. Our coursework included the nuts and bolts of story writing as well as rigorous study of biblical worldview.

The program materialized in 1999 as World magazine

founder Joel Belz and board member Robert Case, among others, recognized a need for skilled writers who can articulate current events through the lens of the Bible. The Amy Foundation also contributed to the Institute's initial start through its founder, the late Jim Russell's participation and giving.

"We took the focus of Jim Russell and the Amy Writing Awards and broadened it into the actual newsrooms of mainstream news organizations," said Case, who serves as director of WJI.

Now, 12 years later, the

Institute has emerged as a premier training ground for up and coming Christian journalists. WJI operates from The Kings College, located in the Empire State Building in New York City. It offers a multi-week summer course to college and post-college students as well as conferences and workshops throughout the year and paid internships for qualified individuals.

In addition to writing, WJI students learn to blog, take photos, produce video, and record audio for the Web.

Continued on page 4 ➤

**Tell Us a
Discipling
Story**

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell? Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to:
Pen & Sword
Editor, The
Amy Founda-
tion,
P.O. Box 16091,
Lansing, MI
48901;
or email
amyfoundtn@
aol.com.

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mation.

The Gift

By: Robin Blonsky

A year ago, I met Jaime, a beautiful girl from a broken home. She had a history of sexual abuse, and an alcoholic father. She lived with a prescription drug addiction, identified herself as a “cutter,” and had tried to kill herself. An intense period at a rehabilitation ministry introduced her to God’s healing love.

I first met Jaime after she graduated from the program. I was asked to mentor her as she acclimated to normal life. Having grown up in a loving Christian family, I felt way out of my comfort zone. Yet, my heart went out to her, and I felt mentoring and discipleship could help continue her healing process.

As I listened to her story, my eyes often trailed to her arm where she self inscribed the word “HATED” with a knife. The letters etched the lie she believed about herself. We met regularly to deal with insecuri-

ties, talk about temptations, and study Scripture.

Recently, while conversing with Jaime, the Lord reminded me about the gift He offers. Our exchange began with her asking for prayer on a particularly hard night. I told her I prayed and reminded her of my love, and most importantly, the Father’s love. Her shame hindered her belief and ability to trust. “If He has forgiven you, then you need to forgive yourself,” I said. “The cross dealt with our sin — it’s our choice to believe, one day at a time.” Jaime realized it’s not about deserving the Father’s love and forgiveness. They are a gift that we accept, not because we do anything to achieve them. That day, I too was reminded never to take salvation for granted. ◀

Robin Blonsky is a business owner and freelance writer from Oklahoma.

► **World Journalism Institute, cont’d from p.3**

Their work is published in the Institute’s online newspaper, *The WJI Times-Observer*, and often in local newspapers nationwide. Many students go on to work in major mainstream media outlets with assistance from the Russell Pulliam Internships and the Belz International Fellowships. WJI’s alumni site shows a growing list of news and broadcast venues where graduates work. For more information or to support the World Journalism Institute, go to www.worldji.com. ◀



Submit Today!

**15 writers will receive
\$34,000 in cash prizes**

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must have been published in a mainstream non-religious publication.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning entries.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.

