

# Jesus, You Are Quite the Fellow

By

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## A Compassionate God

On any given Sunday one is likely to hear a sermon proclaimed from the pulpit of many Christian churches regarding the mercy of God and His compassion toward mankind. The God of Judeo-Christian faith has always been viewed as merciful and compassionate and this teaching is declared repeatedly in the Old Testament: *But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth.* Psalms 86: 15. *The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.* Psalms 145: 8. Although Scripture tells us that God has punished mankind at times, even when men suffer for their sins God has compassion upon those who are grieved: *But though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.* Lamentations 3: 32-33.

Many instances are recorded in the New Testament in which it is said that Jesus had compassion for people. In Hebrews it is written that Jesus is the great high priest who has compassion upon us in times of need: *Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* Hebrews 4: 14-16. The undeserved grace which God has given to men is most clearly demonstrated in the Christian doctrine that He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to lay down his life upon the cross as the one sacrifice for the sins of the whole world forever. The compassion of God to forgive men of their sins was proclaimed by the prophet Micah: *Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.* Micah 7: 18-19.

Is the compassion of God limited to His forgiveness of our sins? Most Christians believe that the mercy and compassion of God is not only manifest in regard to the forgiveness of sins, but it also extends to our individual everyday lives. We acknowledge with thanksgiving that all of the blessings which we receive come from God through His mercy and compassion. When everything is going well, and one is fortunate to enjoy good health, financial security, and emotional fulfillment, it is very easy to be thankful and to proclaim the great compassion and mercy of God. What happens, however, when the circumstances of life become distressing, and God's beneficence is not so obvious to us? In those times it is a much more of a challenge for one to view God as merciful and compassionate. However, even in times of trial and tribulation God is working in ways which we may not see and cannot comprehend. In such times His mercy and compassion is still manifest and something to be praised?

Many circumstances in life can bring great heartache and sorrow. Health concerns, financial difficulties, and the loss of a loved one are examples of such occurrences. When the loss of a loved one involves a child the sorrow is infinitely worse. For a parent, there is no greater tragedy, and no greater source of emotional pain than losing a child of any age. I know this to be true because I lost my 26 year old son, Justin. The death of one's child is a devastating experience of unimaginable dimensions. When that child takes his own life as did my son, it is infinitely more

heartbreaking. For a Christian parent of a child beyond the age of responsibility, who believes in an eternal spiritual existence beyond the grave, not knowing for certain that the child has acknowledged Jesus Christ as their savior at the time of death is a crushing burden. I hold fast to Jesus' own words in John 14:6: *"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes To the Father except through me."* (NIV) Furthermore, I believe there is truth in the claim that is made in Acts 4:12: *Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* (NIV) With the belief that salvation and eternal life is only available to those who confess their sins and believe in Jesus, how could I ever have peace if I did not know that my son had accepted Christ as his savior?

This is the story of my son who battled chronic depression since his early teens, and his tragic, far too early death. What could have been a rewarding and enjoyable life for my son came to an abrupt and horrifying end due to his depression, which compelled me to write this book in order to deal with my enormous grief. The inner pain and despair that my son endured, which is typical of those who suffer from severe depression, will be revealed. Nevertheless, it is not a story of hopelessness, but one of hope and praise; for it is a story of God's compassion and mercy as well. Through the compassion of God I was given a sense of peace which I did not think was possible. With the peace which I was given came the realization that we can never truly know the heart of another. This realization provides a story of hope, the power of prayer, and the confirmation that God can accomplish His purpose in ways we can never comprehend. Most of all, to me it is a demonstration that God is faithful to those who seek Him even in our weakness.

Although my son had been raised in a Christian home and attended Sunday school and Church weekly from the time he was an infant until his late teens it was not at all apparent that he had accepted Jesus as his savior. In fact it appeared that he had rejected the Christian faith. This was, at least in part related to the effect that chronic depression had upon his state of mind. It was also because I, as a Christian father, had not been the influence which I should have been for him. Even though my faith in Jesus Christ has not faltered since I was a child, because of my introverted nature and tendency to keep personal thoughts private, I had not discussed salvation with my two sons. Instead, I had relied upon their instruction regarding matters of faith to be given by others through the church. I had been effective in teaching honesty, a strong work ethic, respect for others, and personal responsibility, but not the most important value of all: reliance upon God and the need for salvation through Jesus Christ.

When at the time of my son's death it was unclear whether or not he had accepted Christ as his personal savior, I was forced to acknowledge my own failure, and to trust that my prayers for his salvation had been answered. Such trust required an enormous amount of faith at a time when it seemed as if I had been abandoned by God. Faced with that daunting challenge, my faith was not up to the task. Yet, despite my lack of faith, I was fortunate enough to have been miraculously blessed and comforted by God with an answer to prayer for assurance regarding my son. The message that I received was so clear as to leave no doubt that my son is now present with our Lord in Glory. God had worked in remarkable and incomprehensible ways to bring about circumstances which led to my son accepting Christ as his savior, and then in an equally amazing way to give me assurance of that fact.

Merely as a result of our physical condition in this world bad things can happen to good people. When facing challenging circumstances Christians are accustomed to offering prayers for deliverance from their troubles. Sometimes those prayers are not answered, or at least not

answered as we would like them to be. We will never be able to explain why tragedies occur, and the reason why some prayers are answered while some are not will forever remain an enigma. In the Bible, the story of Job tells how he was subjected to great suffering. He lost his health, his possessions, and his family. Job questioned God as to why he was so afflicted and had to suffer such great loss. God's answer to Job was to delineate all that He had created, and declare His omnipotence, making it clear to Job that man is incapable of comprehending the purposes of the Almighty God, and the way in which He accomplishes those purposes. The writer of Hebrews made a similar statement regarding this truth in the New Testament: *For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?* Romans 9: 15, 18-21. God, who created all things, accomplishes His purpose in ways mankind is incapable of understanding.

My son Justin struggled with depression for many years. Why was he tormented with severe depression, and why was he not healed despite the prayers of those who loved him? Scripture makes it plain that such things may occur not because of any sin committed by someone, but so that the work of God may be made manifest. When Jesus was asked by his disciples who had sinned to have caused a man to be blind from birth it is written: *Jesus answered, Neither this man nor his parents sinned: but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.* John 9:3 (NIV). My son Justin, the same as many others, was afflicted with depression simply because of the human condition, and not as the result of sin. Through his tragic death, however, the work of God was displayed as will be revealed in this story.

Despite being unable to comprehend why the tragedy of my son's death occurred, I believe even more now than before that God has compassion for us and there is a purpose in everything which happens in our lives, even if that purpose may be unknown. The reason I have such confidence is because of the message that I received in answer to my prayer which provided comfort at the time of my greatest need. What I have written in this book is not a deep philosophical or theological discussion of suffering, tragedy, and grief, because I am not an authority on any of those topics. It was simply my intention to tell a story that might benefit someone who finds themselves in similar circumstances.

My desire is that should anyone who is battling depression read this story, and see themselves in the mirror of my son's life, they might realize that they have much to live for, and they are loved. This realization might then prompt them to seek treatment for their depression and not give up hope. Or if someone should identify similar indications of depression in a loved one, then they might encourage that individual to seek treatment. I would emphasize that although the power of prayer cannot be denied, sometimes the prayer can only be answered when one avails themselves of the medical knowledge with which God has blessed mankind. Another reason for this story is to encourage Christian parents to not neglect the most important thing that can be taught to their children which is the love of God and the need for salvation through Jesus Christ. Finally, if there is anyone whose trust and faith in God's willingness to answer prayer is wavering, especially in regard to their children, then this story might give them assurance and comfort.

## The Early Years

In the days immediately after Justin's funeral I felt compelled to put down in words a tribute to my son and a testimony of God's compassionate answer to my prayer which had comforted me. This began as something that I needed to do in order to deal with my grief. It soon changed into a desire to relate a story which could possibly bring hope to whoever might read what I was writing. But how could I relate the story in such a way for it to be meaningful to others? Most of the things which I remembered about my son were simply everyday life events. I began to record my thoughts as they came to mind in the attempt to describe my son's life and try to express my amazement and gratitude for the answer to my prayer following his tragic death. It became my desire to reveal the compassion of God and the unknowable ways in which God works. A kaleidoscope of memories filled my mind as if I was looking at old photographs in a family album. With the passage of time those memories had begun to fade just as old photographs, but with the intensity of my heightened emotions the recollections became clearer.

My son's entrance into this world, although special to my wife Beianca and me, was quite ordinary. It was a typically cold December evening in Michigan, but fortunately not snowing, as my wife went into labor. As we drove to the hospital where I was in my senior year as an orthopedic surgery resident we were both excited but not quite as anxious as we had been for the birth of our first child. After just a few hours of labor, Justin Matthew Cobb, our second child, was born on December 30, 1979. He was a healthy, beautiful baby boy, taking his first breath at 3:26 AM on a Sunday. Beianca and I were overjoyed at the birth of Justin. In those days before routine ultrasounds in all pregnancies, we did not know in advance whether we would have a boy or girl. To discover that I had another son instead of a daughter was perfectly fine with me. It may have been a very brief and minor disappointment to my wife that it was another boy, but she also could not have been happier. Since Justin had been planned as our last child, our family was complete.

When I initially wrote these words, mere days after the loss of my son, tears came to my eyes as I recalled the day we brought Justin home from the hospital. While my wife and I stood back, we watched in sheer joy as Justin's older brother Nathan, almost three and a half years old at the time, stood at the side of Justin's cradle staring in amazement at the new baby which had come into our home. Nathan would always be a good brother to Justin as they grew older. I envisioned a happy family, enjoying each other's company and many activities together far into the future, and there was no reason to expect otherwise.

As any parent knows, some babies are more difficult than others. I often joked that if Justin had been our first, he would have been an only child. It seemed like the day would never come when he would sleep through the night. Beianca and I had become spoiled by the experience we had with Justin's older brother who began sleeping through the night at about six or seven weeks of age. In fact, however, Justin was actually a very good baby, just a little more work than his older brother had been.

Justin's birth came at a time of significant turmoil in our home. Since I was in my final year of an orthopedic surgery residency, it was necessary for me to line up a position to start a practice. It was a very stressful time. A few years prior to Justin's birth Beianca's parents had moved from

our native Michigan to Arizona. We had visited her parents in their new home two years earlier. Beianca and Nathan, who was only eighteen months old at the time, travelled to Arizona while I was at an orthopedic conference in Chicago. A few days later I departed from O'Hare airport which had just reopened after ten inches of snow closed it down for several hours and flew into Phoenix at 6:30 in the evening. In Phoenix it was 65 balmy degrees in mid February. I immediately fell in love with Arizona and thought that this was the ideal place to live. The weather and the desert scenery in Arizona appealed to me and to my mind, fantastic, and like no other place I had ever seen. Since I had developed a progressive dislike for Michigan winter weather, the year around sunshine of Arizona was much to my liking. I began to consider the desert southwest as the place to establish a practice when my residency was completed.

Two years after our initial visit to Arizona, I decided to seek a position in the Phoenix area to start my practice. In February, 1980, just two months after Justin's birth we took both boys to the Valley of the Sun searching for a place where I could begin my career. Perhaps I should have taken it as a sign for caution that when we arrived in the Phoenix, the desert was experiencing unprecedented rain and what was referred to as a 500 year flood. All but one bridge crossing the Salt River, normally a dry river bed but now a torrent of water one half mile wide, had been washed away. I did not let that deter me. As things turned out maybe I should have been more aware of what God wanted for me, instead of my own desires.

Although Beianca was not at all sure about living in Arizona because of the extreme heat, she went along with the idea because she knew how much I wanted to move there. I was able locate a potential practice opportunity in Mesa, Arizona, and after meeting with the orthopedic surgeon made a verbal agreement to join his practice. If this arrangement worked out we would be able to live only about ten miles from Beianca's parents who were emotionally close to the boys and who absolutely cherished them. This seemed like the right thing to do. Everything appeared to be falling into place for me to start working in the desert southwest. Before returning to Michigan I contracted with a medical practice consultant to finalize the details of the verbal agreement I had established to join the doctor with whom I had met. My career in the private practice of orthopedic surgery would begin in July of that year.

After returning home to Michigan I had a great deal of difficulty finalizing the initial verbal agreement with the other doctor. Attempts that were made by the medical practice consultant to meet with the doctor who I was to join failed when the meetings were repeatedly cancelled. My own attempts to contact the doctor by phone were also unsuccessful. I became fearful that I would complete my residency training and not have a place to start my practice. It was not until just three or four weeks prior to the completion of my residency in June that I was finally able to contact the doctor who I was expecting to join.

I was shocked beyond belief when the doctor said that he had reconsidered, and did not want to share an office with anyone. He informed me that since he had promised a position for me, he had come up with another alternative. I was given the assurance that I would have a place to start my practice, but it was not exactly what I had anticipated. He had taken over the practice of a retiring orthopedist and said I would be allowed to use the retired doctor's office and staff. Needless to say, the uncertainty surrounding the practice situation created significant tension in our home which may have been part of the reason why Justin was frequently still not sleeping through the night. Despite this problem he was otherwise a beautiful child who we adored and who, along with his brother, brought us enormous pleasure.

Finishing my residency in June, 1980, our family made the move from Michigan to Mesa, Arizona where I was set to begin the private practice of orthopedic surgery for which I had spent so many years preparing. Nathan made the trip by plane with Beianca's parents who had come to Michigan to help us with the move. With a second car in tow Beianca and I traveled west with six month old Justin by car. During our time in Arizona while I was lining up a practice opportunity we had committed to the purchase of a house which was to be constructed. The house was not yet finished when we arrived in Arizona and so we initially stayed with Beianca's parents who were ecstatic with having the boys around. Two months later, with the construction complete, we then moved into our first house. We had very little furniture or other belongings when we moved and as Justin grew and began to walk he had plenty of room to roam. Oftentimes he was nowhere to be found and would be discovered hiding in the nearly empty kitchen cabinets. He also developed a dislike for his crib and started crawling out on his own, wandering about the house in the night.

When we first moved into the new house, in addition to it being the middle of the summer and extremely hot, the yard was simply dirt, and so the boys could not play outside much. As soon as we could afford the expense we had sod laid in the back yard. In my spare time I did most of the landscaping in the yard myself and built a play structure on which the boys could climb with swings and a fireman's pole. Then the boys were able to play outside where Justin tried to keep up with his older brother. Thinking he could do anything his older brother did, Justin tried to slide down the fireman's pole and fell from the play structure into the gravel below getting quite a "strawberry" on his face. Beianca's parents spent a lot of time with the boys during this period. Justin and Papa became very close; and in fact were nearly inseparable. At this time there was no indication of any problems whatsoever with Justin's physical and emotional development. Other than being a picky eater, sometimes eating only peanut butter and corn several days in a row, and also being a little fussy at times, more than his brother had been, he was what anyone would consider a normal, happy child.

Some unexpected difficulties arose in getting my practice started. This, along with the fact that I was in solo practice rather than partnered with another doctor as I had expected, made it necessary for me to be on call 24/7. Being constantly on call caused me to become quite irritable, again raising tension in the home. Eventually my practice situation stabilized and it seemed to be progressing well, but Beianca was not very happy. Although we were near her parents, with two small boys at home she had very little chance to get out and have time for herself. She missed her friends back in Michigan and she also disliked the absence of seasons along with the extreme summer heat to which she could not become acclimated.

For some time, beginning in my last year of residency and continuing for six months or more after moving to Arizona, we had become lax in our church attendance. Whereas since childhood both Beianca and I had seldom missed church we were attending only occasionally. Both of us agreed that it was necessary for ourselves and especially for our boys to resume church attendance on a more regular basis. We had been attending a Nazarene church in Michigan for several years before our move and we found a Nazarene church in Mesa which was close to our home. When we resumed regular church attendance it provided a much needed sense of stability for me.

Things were going reasonably well with my practice and then in the spring of 1982 I was presented with a most unexpected opportunity. A former fellow resident with whom I had trained

and who had established an orthopedic practice in the area where we previously lived, called me out of the blue asking if I might be interested in returning to Michigan. He said that he needed someone with whom to share his office as he was becoming too busy and could no longer handle the workload himself. My first inclination was to decline the invitation as being out of the question. There was no way I was about to leave Arizona. I loved the climate and I considered the desert landscape to be beautiful. Although I wasn't quite as busy as I wanted to be, my practice was starting to grow. Additionally, after the initial difficulties in starting my practice, I had just moved into a new office in a newly constructed building, and I had put a great deal of money into furnishings and equipment for the office including an X-ray machine and developer. I would certainly take a big financial hit if I gave this up and returned to Michigan. This time, however, unlike when I had decided to move to Arizona, I prayed about it. I asked God to help me to make the right decision for both my family and me. I came to believe that God wanted us to return to Michigan and the decision was made to accept the offer.

We moved back to Michigan in September, 1982. As I recalled our second cross country move, some simple things were brought to mind. With our belongings being shipped back by moving van, we made the trip by car. Actually, it was two cars. Nathan and I travelled in one car and Justin with his mother in the other. At less than three years of age Justin could be a little difficult when confined to a car seat for long periods of time. Beianca, being much more patient than I am, and being more attuned to meeting Justin's needs, could handle him better. On the way Justin played with a little silver gun, the only toy gun he ever had, to go "bang bang" continuously at the passing cars. At night when Beianca and I were exhausted from driving for 10-12 hours, the boys who had been confined to the car all day wanted to play. I can still picture them both having so much fun jumping from bed to bed in the motel rooms. The trip took four days to cover the 2000 miles from Mesa, Arizona to Rochester, Michigan. For a child of his age Justin had done quite well on the trip, but we were glad to have arrived at our once old, and now new, home town.

Upon our return to Michigan, just as I had done when we moved to Arizona, I started working immediately. Before long I was busier than I had been in Arizona. I knew many of the doctors from my residency who practiced at the same hospital, and this made for a more comfortable situation than it had been in Arizona where I did not know anyone. However, just as with the situation I had encountered in starting my practice in Arizona, I discovered that not everything occurs according to one's plans. After only one year it became apparent that the office sharing arrangement I had expected to continue was not going to work. It became necessary for me to open my own office, working at the same hospital, but in solo practice once again. In order to meet the expenses of opening my own office, it was necessary for me to take a great deal of emergency room call, and my practice gradually grew. Long work days and frequent trips to the ER at night and on weekends and holidays meant that Beianca was often on her own raising the boys. I can't say enough about my wonderful wife Beianca. During this time when I was not home much she was always the perfect mother; providing care, making things fun for the boys, giving support, encouragement, and unconditional love in all circumstances.

In order to be of help to Beianca, and also for my own enjoyment, I made an effort to refrain from becoming so busy that I could not spend time with the boys. When I was at home my job was playing with Nathan and Justin, and it was certainly my favorite job. The three of us could usually be found in a big pile wrestling on the family room floor. In the summer we were always

outside playing. I built another play structure for the boys, and we played baseball using tennis balls and soccer in the back yard, and basketball in the driveway. I called Justin the “gnat” because of his tenacious defense while playing basketball. In the winter we would make snow forts and dinosaur snow sculptures. While others made snowmen, we made a snow Tyrannosaurus rex. When we had to be inside we often played the game Pictionary which involves drawing pictures for clues. Both boys drew their pictures much better than I. Frequently when I had orthopedic journals to read I would sit in the recliner with both boys in my lap as I read. My most cherished memories are those of carrying the boys upstairs to bed each night and reading to them from an array of children’s books, afterward helping them say their prayers, and then tucking them in for the night. It was a happy and joyous time for our family.

As it turned out, by returning to Michigan there were unexpected benefits. My father had developed coronary artery disease which required bypass surgery while I was still a resident. He continued to have heart problems for several years thereafter. I was able to spend time with my father before his death in 1985 from cardiac failure. My older sister Sue developed an aggressive breast cancer and succumbed to that dreadful disease in 1993. I was able to see my sister quite often before she passed away. If we had remained in Arizona I would not have been able to share the last days with either my father or my sister which would have made their passing even more painful than it was. This was one instance of God “working in mysterious ways.”

## Growing Up

From the time he began to walk Justin tried to do everything that his older brother did, but because of the age difference he simply couldn't. He sometimes became very frustrated because of his limitations, and it was difficult to reassure him that it was only because he was younger. Much of the time he merely played by himself. Justin could keep himself occupied playing alone with blocks, Matchbox and Hot Wheels cars. His favorite toy was a larger model of the Duke boys' car, the "General Lee." For the longest time I don't think that car left his hand while he was awake. He also loved playing with his collection of plastic dinosaurs. In addition, he had a menagerie of stuffed animals that he would dress up and play with for hours on end.

Of all his stuffed animals there was not one favorite, but Justin seemed to alternate between which one he could not sleep without. While on vacation to Disney World, his favorite at the time was a little stuffed horse which was accidentally left in the motel room when we drove off. When it was discovered that the horse was not in the car Justin was inconsolable. We had to drive back about 20 miles to where we had stayed and Beianca looked through a mountain of the motel's dirty laundry for the little stuffed horse. Miraculously, it was found, making it possible for Justin to sleep that night.

Speaking of animals, Justin loved all kinds of living ones too. He really enjoyed catching butterflies and other insects. He became concerned for the earthworms on the sidewalk after a rain and thought they had to be saved. When Papa and Grammy visited from Arizona once, he had Pops outside in the rain helping him to pick up all the earthworms they could find on the driveway and sidewalk and putting them back in the grass. Beianca and I thought it would be good for the boys to have a pet since both of them loved animals. We thought that a dog would be best, but we didn't know what breed that we should consider. The uncertainty was resolved when we took the boys to a dog show at the Cobo Hall convention center in Detroit to see all of the various breeds. As we were walking down one of the aisles at the show looking at the variety of dogs we came across a breed with which we were not familiar. It was a medium size, buff colored dog with a long beard, and amazingly soft fur. As we approached the obviously friendly dog it licked little Justin on the face causing him to giggle. We had found the kind of dog that we wanted; a soft-coated wheaten terrier.

Not long afterward we purchased a wheaten puppy that the boys, especially Justin, just loved. We named the dog Sparky. A single name for the puppy was just not adequate in Justin's mind. He thought it needed first, middle, and last names. At the time, Sparky Anderson was the Detroit Tigers manager. Since I am somewhat of a baseball fan and watched the Tiger games on TV whenever possible, Justin had heard the coach's name many times. He wanted the puppy to be named after Sparky Anderson. Since Justin did not have the name quite right Sparky the puppy became "Sparky Barky Henderson."

While house training the puppy we kept Sparky in a cage at night and when we were away from the house. Justin was often found in the cage with Sparky, playing or sometimes sleeping. Attempting to teach both boys responsibility we had them alternate taking the dog out on a leash to do its duty. For some reason every time it was Justin's turn to take the dog out, when Sparky came back in he invariably wet on the floor. This never occurred when anyone else took the

puppy out. It wasn't until we discovered that whenever Justin took the dog out all they did was play that we understood why.

As the boys were growing up we spent a lot of time with friends who had lived next to us before we moved to Arizona. They had two boys of their own who were about the same age as ours. When we moved back to Michigan our families spent a lot of time together. Justin was the youngest and although he couldn't always keep up with the others in some of their activities they all got along very well with hardly ever a problem. Justin could be stubborn at times but he got along with other children as well in Sunday school and pre-school. Still, as he got older he often preferred to spend long periods of time by himself building things with Legos and playing with his other toys.

One activity that Justin enjoyed from a very early age was drawing pictures. He didn't like to use coloring books all that much because he wanted to do his own thing and create pictures of his own. Like his older brother he had obvious artistic talent for his age and an even greater imagination. Sometimes he would draw his own cartoon strips, making up a story that usually only he could understand. At other times he might create games with pictures on pieces of paper which he used like playing cards. It was hilarious trying to play his games because the rules were constantly changing according to his whims.

I always tried to lighten my work schedule around Christmas time in order to be with the family. At Christmas time every year the boys and I used a paper link chain with small portions of the Christmas story on each link, reading a section daily to count down the days until Christmas. Then I would read to them the full story of Jesus' birth on Christmas Eve. I regret it now, but we were never much for taking pictures or videos except at Christmas when we decorated the tree and when the boys opened their gifts. Two recollections come to mind in that regard. The first is the most precious video I ever took. It was either the first or second Christmas that we were back in Michigan. After the tree was decorated we turned off all of the room lights and turned on the Christmas tree lights. I began taking a video of the tree when Nathan and Justin walked up to the tree; both staring at the ornaments and the lights. As they stood side by side, Nathan put his arm around his younger brother. There could be a no more beautiful sight than two brothers showing their love for each other and sharing in the joyful anticipation of Christmas.

The other memory is more typical of Justin. The movie "A Christmas Story" set in the 1940's about a boy named Ralphie who wants a Red Ryder BB gun for Christmas became a must see on TV for the boys and me every Christmas season. In one scene from this movie Ralphie and his little brother Randy are opening their Christmas gifts. As they both open boxes which contain socks, they look at each other, and then throw the socks over their heads behind them, immediately proceeding on to open the next gift. When Justin was nine or ten, I was videotaping the boys opening their Christmas gifts. As I panned over to Justin he opened a package which contained socks. With a big grin on his face, he tossed the socks over his head and went on to the next gift, deliberately re-enacting the scene from the movie.

In the time that I spent with the boys I tried to instill in them a desire for physical fitness. Being someone who has avidly exercised all of my life and having an interest in sports, I tried to get both boys involved in a variety of sports activities. Along with the knowledge that regular physical activity is good for one's health, I also believe that involvement in sports helps to build character, improves confidence, and can be a way of making friends. This is especially true for

those who are naturally shy which I had discovered for myself. I attempted to get both boys involved in athletic activities, but where Nathan was eager to try almost anything, Justin was very reluctant. Justin seemed to have a fear of failure and a feeling that he could not compare to his older brother. The other thing about sports is that there are rules to games and Justin simply did not like to follow rules; he preferred to make his own rules.

Despite Justin's reluctance, I made him try soccer one year where he made no effort. Next it was Little League baseball where it was apparent he did not want to participate. He seemed to be afraid to swing the bat even though when I played with him in the back yard he demonstrated an ability to hit the ball pretty well. Again it appeared that he was afraid of failure, despite the encouragement we tried to give him. As he entered middle school I encouraged him to wrestle one year and run track another year. Although he was physically coordinated and seemed to have some innate ability, he showed no interest in any of these sports.

The only physical activity that Justin really enjoyed was downhill skiing. He had taken skiing lessons for two years starting at about age ten and caught on rapidly. Justin had excellent balance and was fearless on the slopes. Flying down the hill, he would make a turn only when absolutely necessary but in full control. I don't recall ever seeing him fall. On the ski hill he could make his own rules and do what he wanted. Since I had not started skiing until I was 40 years old, and with a chronic knee problem already, Justin had no problem skiing circles around me especially on the moguls. More importantly this was an activity where he could keep up with his older brother. Justin seemed very confident and happy when skiing. We had several enormously fun ski trips, initially on small slopes in Michigan and then on annual ski trips to Utah and Colorado for seven or eight years.

Growing up, both boys enjoyed nature and catching "critters" so we decided to have a new house built in an area where they would have the environment conducive to such activity. We located some property with a large lot, an adjacent pond, a wooded area, and a marsh. It was perfect for catching snakes, turtles, and frogs. The property was purchased and construction of our future home was begun with the expectation of moving into the new house 12-14 months later. Unfortunately, the move to the new home was further into the future than we had planned. There were many delays in construction and by the time we moved into the house in 1992, Nathan was beyond the stage of catching "critters," but Justin was not.

About two months after moving in we had a crew in the house installing window film to block UV rays when they smelled smoke coming from Justin's upstairs bedroom. The workers pulled a smoldering towel off the top of a lampshade and it immediately burst into flames. Fortunately, they were able to throw the flaming towel out of a window before any real damage was done. Our new home, for which we had waited so long, had been saved from destruction. Why was there a towel over the lampshade? It turned out that Justin, feeling sorry for an abandoned duck or goose egg, and not telling anyone, had wrapped the egg in a bath towel and placed it over the lamp which he used as an incubator. This was typical Justin, sensitive and concerned for the life within an egg just as he had been at a younger age for the earthworms on the sidewalk. We couldn't be mad at him but told him never to try that method of incubation again.

Both boys had various pets through the years including a tiger gecko, which at Justin's insistence was smuggled back on the airplane from Arizona where it was caught while visiting Papa and Grammy, a chameleon, a sand skink, a ball python, and ferrets. Justin took great care of his

critters and became very upset when any of them died. On one occasion, when Justin was eleven or twelve, after the death of his chameleon he was especially saddened, and expressed the belief that nothing good ever happened to him. We thought it was just the emotion of the moment or a stage he was going through and not anything more.

## The Struggle Begins

Justin had always spent a lot of time alone, but as he began middle school it seemed to be getting more often. He also was becoming very angry over little things, and frequently expressed feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness. Whereas he had never been in any kind of trouble before and had no problem getting along with others, he now became involved in a fight at school, and later was disciplined for causing damage to a school desk. At about 14 years of age he refused to get his hair cut, even though long hair was not really the style at the time. During a confrontation with him over his refusal to cut his hair I became angry and nearly came to the point of hitting him (he was now taller than me.) This frightened me to think that I might strike the son I loved and I immediately decided that it wasn't worth the argument and so I let it go. About the same time I discovered something that bothered me much more. I learned that Justin was secretly smoking cigarettes. Aside from my personal convictions that it is wrong to do harm to God's temple, the human body, I was concerned about the long term implications for his health. I thought it was just a rebellious stage he was going through, and that it would pass.

During the summer of 1994 as Nathan was preparing to go off to college, Justin became more withdrawn and irritable. He had also become argumentative with his mother and me. One day after some minor argument with his mother, Beianca came to me as I was outside doing some yard work and told me she was very worried about Justin. She said that Justin had stormed out of the house in anger and was heading into the woods by the marsh adjacent to our property. Even though I did not think it was anything serious, since Beianca was so obviously concerned, I started out into the wooded area where Justin had gone.

Entering the woods, I looked ahead about 25-30 yards and saw Justin standing on the limb of a tree about six feet up facing me. Walking toward him I called out to him, asking what he was doing. Justin did not answer, and as I got closer to him a sense of fear such as I had never known struck me when I saw the rope. He had thrown a rope over a limb above him and had a noose around his neck. Running as fast as I could toward the tree, I screamed for him not to move. He looked straight ahead with a blank stare and stepped off the branch. I arrived at the tree just as he stepped off the limb and was able to catch him by the thighs which I held with all my might. Since I could not lift him high enough to reach the limb he had been standing on, I begged him to loosen the noose around his neck and remove the rope. I told him that I loved him and after what seemed like an hour, but was probably less than one minute, he did as I asked. Lowering him to the ground, I hugged him and again told him I loved him. As we walked slowly back to the house together, Justin had a blank expression and was emotionless, but tears filled my eyes. How could I, a doctor, not have been able to see the severe depression that had overtaken my son? I couldn't bear to think what might have happened if Beianca had not been more perceptive than I had been. Justin was in need of immediate psychiatric treatment for his fragile emotional state and the severe depression that had consumed him.

The next few weeks, at least up until then, was the most agonizing time of my life. There was a constant fear that Justin might try to end his life again. We immediately brought Justin in for evaluation and he was diagnosed with severe clinical depression, and he began outpatient treatment at a juvenile psychiatric facility. An antidepressant was prescribed but Justin refused to

take it, insisting that there was nothing wrong with him. I prayed continually that Justin would not make another suicide attempt and I prayed that he would be cured of his depression.

This period of time was especially difficult for my wife who stopped all of her other activities in order to be with Justin full time. She made certain that Justin had daily structured activity to prevent him from dwelling on negative thoughts and she kept him under constant observation. Despite the fact that Justin did not participate much in his treatment, his suicidal ideation resolved. Gradually he improved to the point that it was no longer necessary to watch him constantly, but he remained somewhat withdrawn. Over the next year Justin seemed to lack motivation, but presented no behavioral problems.

Knowing that aerobic exercise raises endorphin levels which can be of benefit in reducing feelings of depression, as Justin began his sophomore year in high school I encouraged him to run cross-country, which both I and his brother had done. Of course he had no interest or desire to do it, but he complied with my wishes. Justin had shown some potential when I had made him run track one year in middle school where he ran the ½ mile and the mile. I was hoping that he might gain some benefit from the activity and also make some friends. Because of his decreased level of energy secondary to depression, and the fact that he continued to smoke in secret, he was unable to run well. He did complete the season, however, and I was proud of the effort that he made despite his depression.

For the next couple of years Justin remained improved slowly. He still spent a great deal of time alone, playing video games and listening to music. However, he had started to become a bit more social. There were two boys who lived nearby with whom he began to hang out. Although he was no longer obviously depressed, he did not seem to have much enjoyment in life. At home he remained good and respectful son.

Justin's spirits did perk up a bit when we bought him a used Jeep Cherokee for his sixteenth birthday. The Jeep did seem to bring him enjoyment and he was a good, safe driver. He also enjoyed our annual ski trips out west until I had to stop skiing due to a bad knee. My concern was for his future as he disliked academics and had no interest in school. Because he was very bright he was still able to get decent grades without making much of an effort. It was like pulling teeth to get him to do his school work though. I don't think he ever read an entire book upon which he had to write reports, but was able to do just good enough to get by. This was not good enough for him to survive the rigors of college, however.

## Opportunity Knocks

The one class in which Justin excelled was art. He especially enjoyed drawing as he had since early childhood. Unlike academics, no prodding was required for him to do his art work for school. During the summer prior to his senior year in high school my prayer that Justin would find an interest to pursue and some purpose in his life was answered. My nephew Dan, Justin's cousin, had started his own advertising agency a few years earlier that was beginning to flourish. Dan knew about Justin's problem with depression, and he was also aware of his artistic abilities. He offered Justin the opportunity to work in computer graphics as an unpaid intern at his office.

This seemed like the ideal situation: not only for the exposure to computer graphics which might open up a career opportunity, but just as important if not more so, the type of environment he would be in. Dan's office was a very casual, open environment conducive to enhancing creativity. Also, Dan had been a Christian young adult leader, many of his employees were active in the church as well, and they frequently held Bible study sessions among themselves. Justin was not very excited about the opportunity at first as he began doing simple computer graphics work. He caught on quickly and developed more interest in the work. Soon he was able to do things that others with far more training and experience were capable of doing. Before long Justin was offered a position with pay. It appeared that he had found his future career and for the first time in a long time appeared to be happy. Justin became much less withdrawn and returned to being the playful joker that he had been as a young child. There was much more interaction between Justin and his mother and me.

As mentioned before, Justin had refused to get his hair cut when he was about 14 years old. He continued to let it grow and it was now down to the middle of his back. It no longer bothered me and I felt that as long as he remained the good kid that he was I didn't care. It was a source of frequent good natured kidding, however, from both Beianca and me. In addition to his long hair Justin developed his own personal sartorial style. He started wearing a floppy leather Australian outback style hat and in inclement weather he wore a long waterproof canvas western style coat. The combination of his hat and coat along with heavy boots made him look like a cowboy coming off a cattle drive. I started calling him "High Plains Drifter" and "Pale Rider" after the characters in a couple of Clint Eastwood westerns. He stood out as being different which may be exactly how he felt.

I had always been playful with the boys even as they grew older, especially with Justin. There was a lot of good natured teasing among us all. The boys frequently teased me about my idiosyncrasies and I loved it. However, by nature I am a perfectionist, and outside of our playfulness I may have placed more pressure on the boys than I realized at the time. Justin, being much like me, was also a perfectionist. This served him well as he continued working in computer graphics. After winning an award in a regional high school art competition Justin was accepted to art school at the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit. He began work toward a degree in art direction in the fall of 1998. Justin continued to work for Dan even while attending art school. Here was a young man, previously without motivation, now working long hours and enjoying it.

After his first year in art school with art direction as his major Justin realized that he was able to do everything that those having completed their training could do. He wanted a greater challenge and so he changed his major field of study to 3-D animation. Now this field really excited him and he was enthusiastic about doing more complicated graphics. As he continued going to school and working for Dan, he decided that he only needed three years of school to do the kind of work that he wanted to do. The fourth year of art school would simply consist of the kind of work he had already been doing for Dan as well as some academic English classes in which he had no interest. He would not have a degree but he had already established an impressive portfolio of work if he ever needed a resume for another job. We tried to convince him to complete courses in order to earn a degree, but to no avail, and I couldn't argue with his logic. He had shown such talent in animation that Dan was planning to have Justin be in charge of an animation department for his agency.

Although Justin enjoyed his job and told us about his projects at work, we were not sure how he was doing in regard to social interaction. However, we did get reports from Dan that Justin was doing some amazing work and we also learned that everyone in the office thought highly of him. His work was so good that when he was still a high school student he was an integral part of a team that won a local Emmy award for graphics in print advertisement. Justin eventually went on to win or be nominated for numerous other Detroit area advertising Emmy's. Justin designed an animated rotating ball logo for a bank commercial which became the symbol for the bank. Subsequently all branches of the bank placed the ball based upon his design on the building or in the lobby. He did the animation work using difficult mathematics equations that he had never been taught. Dan's company received the contract to create a series of medically oriented television programs for a large hospital system. The series called "Minds of Medicine" often required animations to demonstrate anatomy or surgical procedures. In order to create the animations for numerous "Minds of Medicine" programs Justin borrowed my anatomy books and did fantastic renditions. Without having any architectural training, he helped to draw designs for the exterior and interior of buildings. Not only was he able to do all of that, but he also became the computer repair tech for Dan's entire office, teaching himself to troubleshoot computer and networking problems and fix them. Whenever asked, he would fix the computers even when it meant working overnight. I always knew that Justin was bright, but now I know he was brilliant.

During this time, especially in the first few years working for Dan, Justin was exposed to religious discussions and Bible study. I was not aware of the extent to which this occurred as he never talked about it. Even though I asked him to go, he stopped attending church with his mother and me. Another problem started while he was attending art school; he began drinking. On only one occasion while Justin was still at home did this become known to me. Justin had made friends with several other art students and started going to Detroit on Friday and Saturday nights to do things those friends who lived in the city near the school. He had always come home after spending time with them until one night when I received a call at about 2 AM. It was Justin and he was obviously drunk. He told me that he had been drinking, and said he was sorry. Fortunately he was thoughtful enough to not attempt driving home in his condition and said he would be staying the night. I told him that I was disappointed in his actions, but thanked him for calling and for not trying to drive home. When he came home the next day I informed him in no uncertain terms that if I found out that he ever drove after drinking I would take his Jeep away and sell it. He already knew that I opposed drinking and it was not necessary to repeat myself.

From that time on, there was no indication that he had a drinking problem, although I have since discovered that he probably did.

Despite his accomplishments and despite being liked by his fellow employees, Justin started to complain that he did not do things as well as he should have and he felt like he had few friends. At times he seemed depressed when those friends that he had either got married or moved away. A couple of years after leaving art school he also developed a need to be on his own and provide for himself. Beianca and I were concerned that he might become more depressed again if he was on his own but he was not happy “living off of us.” In the summer of 2003 Justin purchased a condo. Beianca and I painted the rooms of the condo for him and with his best friend Eric, I helped him move. As Justin moved into his own place he and I joked about his good paying job and nice condo compared to his older brother, the “professional student,” who was working toward a biochemistry PhD and several years away from a decent income. At the time of Justin’s move he appeared quite happy and excited about being on his own. His future was beginning to look a bit brighter as he no longer seemed depressed.

## Something in Common

Justin and I were very similar in more ways than our perfectionist tendencies. He may have looked more like his mother but there was no doubt that he had inherited my personality. Both of us were very private and reluctant to let people know us well, shy around strangers, stubborn, and a bit quick tempered. Our quick temper was always in regard to circumstances and situations, and not directed toward others. Even though there was no question of our deep love for each other, and a closeness of spirit, we did not have much in common to talk about. Neither of us talked much anyway.

When Justin would visit after he moved into his own place, our conversations would usually go something along the lines of Justin teasing me for being short (I'm 5'7 and he was about 6'1 or 6'2, I don't know how that happened.) I would make fun of his big floppy hat which he had worn everywhere he went for several years. Then he would start telling me how much harder he works than me, which actually had become true as I slowed down my practice. However, not willing to concede that to him I would say that he didn't know the meaning of real work. I might also kid him again about his long hair or his unchanging wardrobe of black jeans and plaid shirt. All the while we would each be grinning. Knowing that I always like to sit in my favorite recliner to watch TV, he would take it over and force me to extricate him from it, and it had become far more difficult to manage that process. While writing this last paragraph it became progressively more difficult as I began to cry, knowing I will never feel the joy of his physical presence again.

In the fall of 2003 we finally developed a common interest that we could share. I am a longstanding automobile enthusiast and had talked often about a desire to get a classic muscle car. Justin had become interested in cars as well and said that he did not want to do what all of the young people his age were doing; souping up 4 cylinder Japanese "rice burners." He wanted to get some real Detroit iron, an old V8 muscle car. This truly was my son! Since my garage was filled I was unable to pursue my interest, but helping Justin fix up an old car was the next best thing to having one of my own. With great anticipation we both started checking the classifieds for an appropriate prospect for him to buy.

Justin found a listing for a 1972 Oldsmobile Cutlass. He called me and asked if I would go with him to look it over. The car was partially restored, having been painted a classic muscle car color, huffer orange. It had a new white vinyl top, restored white vinyl interior, and in addition some great looking old school five spoke chrome wheels. Although the car needed some mechanical work, it appeared to have a straight body, and being originally from the south, did not seem to have much underlying rust. Turning the key in the ignition, the Cutlass started right up and that unmistakable sound of an American made V8 muscle car coming out of the dual exhaust brought back my memories of cruising Woodward Avenue and caused my heart to flutter. The car had that fantastic muscle car stance, having a similar appearance to a more common Chevelle or GTO, but unique. It was just what Justin was looking for; something a little different. The asking price was reasonable and so Justin decided to buy it. A few days later we went back to pick up the car and I followed him home. I was so happy for Justin who, himself, now seemed much happier than he had been in years. Now we had something in common and something we could do together.

Since the '72 Cutlass came from the era of initial emission controls, the engine was not all that strong. Justin had planned to drive the car for a year or so and then have that problem corrected. However, not long after buying the car the engine started sputtering and running badly. The intended engine rebuild would have to be done much sooner than planned. With eager anticipation, together we ordered some high performance parts online and located a good mechanic to rebuild the engine. Justin brought the car in to have the engine pulled and arranged to have the original 350 cu. in. 200 Hp engine rebuilt using a performance intake manifold, a new camshaft, high performance pistons, a solid state ignition, and an Edelbrock four barrel carburetor. The mechanic's calculations revealed that this would bring the power up to a very respectable muscle car level of 360 Hp and 400 lb of torque. The Cutlass was now going to have the "go" to match the "show" and Justin was happier than ever.

Anyone who has ever owned an old car knows quite well that unexpected problems frequently arise. That was certainly the case for the Cutlass. After the engine rebuild another problem arose. If I had been a bit more circumspect, I might have foreseen the problem coming. The partial restoration of the Cutlass, including the paint job, had been performed by the previous owner himself in his garage. It had become apparent that the orange paint job, although looking very good from 20-30 feet away, was not so good after all. The paint was beginning to crack and blister in a few areas indicating that the preparation of the surface prior to painting had been inadequate. Justin decided to have it repainted the same color and took the car to a bump and paint shop in April, 2005, with the expectation that he would have the car back in 6-8 weeks. That would leave plenty of time with good weather in which to drive it before putting it away for the winter.

As the work was begun on the Cutlass, the car which did not appear to have much rust was found to have a very rusty A-pillar; the roof support alongside the windshield. The bump and paint man said that this would require some special restoration to maintain integrity of the roof support which is necessary for safety. For a variety of reasons the work on the car was delayed for an inordinate period of time. Since he was without the Cutlass, at least for awhile, Justin wanted something more fun to drive than the compact pickup truck he had purchased in 2000 when he finished art school.

There was one particular vehicle which Justin really wanted, and it belonged to me. I had a GMC Typhoon which I purchased new in 1993. For those who may not have interest in high performance cars, and are unfamiliar with this vehicle, it is a limited production compact, two door SUV with a lowered stance, body cladding, all wheel drive, and a powerful turbocharged V6. This is not your typical family oriented people mover. The Typhoon has amazing acceleration, being able to go from 0-60 in 5.3 seconds. When the turbocharger kicks in and one is forced back into the seat, the feeling is exhilarating. Justin had attempted to convince me that I should sell it to him. As I used my Typhoon to drive in the winter months because of its AWD which allowed me to drive in the snow which was impossible to do in my sports car, I was not about to sell it. When he realized I wasn't going to part with my Typhoon he started looking to find one on EBay and AutoTrader.

After losing to a higher bidder on one Typhoon, a new listing on EBay came up for a 1993 Typhoon with only 26,000 miles which was available at an auto dealership. Justin called the dealership to ask about it and also inquired as to the value he could get for a trade-in on his pickup truck. The Typhoon had a "buy it now" price of \$11,000 and they offered \$7,000 in trade-in

value for his truck. This asking price was at least \$5,000 below the going value for a low mileage Typhoon and the amount offered for his truck was \$1,000 more than he was told he could get by a local dealership. It sounded like a good deal. The only problem was that the car dealership that listed the Typhoon was in Florida.

I was unaware of all these things when Justin called me at my office one Thursday afternoon. He asked me if I would like to take a “little” drive to buy a Typhoon. The “little” drive was 1100 miles from Michigan to Quincy, Florida. Since I had been taking Fridays off for awhile I was not scheduled to work the following day and I hesitated only a moment before saying, “yeah, let’s go.” Justin placed a \$500 deposit to stop the EBay auction and at 6:00 pm that day we were on our way. Heading south on I-75 toward Florida we drove non-stop except to buy gas. We drove in torrential downpours during the dark of night through a Kentucky construction zone, through the most dense population of highway patrol that I have ever seen in southern Georgia, and on to little Quincy, Florida. We arrived at about noon on Friday. Justin slept a little while I drove, but I couldn’t sleep when he was driving. I think I was more excited than him.

The Typhoon was at a Dodge dealership and the salesman said that he had been told it was a special high performance vehicle, but he had never heard of a Typhoon. It had been a trade-in from a veteran triple amputee and had been converted back from hand controls to regular drive. There was also a very interesting thing about the vehicle regarding a particular autograph on the glove box door. It had been signed by one of the most famous NASCAR racers of all time: the late Dale Earnhardt. We looked over the vehicle and then Justin asked me to take it out first for the test drive since I was most familiar with how a Typhoon is supposed to feel, having owned one for 12 years. As Justin and I drove out of the dealership parking lot and onto the highway there was a severe vibration in the steering wheel. Then when the road was clear of traffic I pushed the accelerator hard to see how it responded. Instead of being forced back into the seat as should have occurred, there was only a strangely muffled exhaust sound and the acceleration of an econobox. After driving a mile or two I turned around and tried to accelerate hard again but with the same disappointing results.

There was certainly something wrong with this Typhoon. I told Justin that with only 26,000 miles on the odometer, the vehicle probably had been driven very infrequently. The problem might be something as simple as gummed up fuel injectors or a plugged fuel filter. Flat spots on the tires as the result of sitting for long periods of time might account for the steering wheel shimmy. In addition, I had noted an aftermarket small diameter dual exhaust had been installed which replaced the larger diameter normal exhaust system. This probably accounted for the different sound, and because of back pressure from the small diameter exhaust, it might also be at least part of the reason for the disappointing lack of acceleration. However, although I know a bit about cars, I am certainly not an expert mechanic, and I told Justin that it could be something far more serious.

Justin then drove the Typhoon and said, “It sure doesn’t feel like yours.” We returned to the dealership unsure of what to do. The dilemma was that even though the mileage was low, we couldn’t be sure of the extent of the problems, or even if we could make the trip all the way back to Michigan without breaking down should we buy the vehicle. The thought of getting stranded far from home was quite unsettling. We told the salesman that we would have to think it over. Having not eaten anything since leaving Michigan other than some granola bars and Twizzlers, we headed off to a fast food restaurant for some lunch and a conversation. Over lunch we talked

about the possible problems and I told Justin that it was totally up to him since it was his money and not mine. I assured him that even though we had driven so far, I would support his decision, and it was not a problem for me if he decided not to buy the Typhoon and we just went back home in his pickup.

With much regret Justin determined that he couldn't take the chance on buying the Typhoon. Finishing our submarine sandwiches, we headed back to the Dodge dealership to see if Justin might be able to get the dealership to return his \$500 deposit which he had given to stop the EBay auction. I was going to drive the first leg of the trip back home and so I drove to the dealership and stayed in the pickup while Justin went in to talk with the salesman. It seemed to be taking longer than I expected when another employee from the dealership came up to the driver's side window of the pickup and asked for the keys. He said that he needed to take the truck for a test drive in order to confirm the trade-in value. When I told him that Justin had decided not to buy the Typhoon and that we would be taking the pickup back home, he then said to me, "No, they made a deal."

Justin met me at the door when I walked into the showroom in a state of confusion. He said that he had told the salesman that the vehicle did not drive like a Typhoon should and detailed the problems we had noticed, asking for a refund of his deposit. When the salesman asked Justin what he could do to make the deal, Justin quickly said, "I'll trade the pickup for the Typhoon straight-up." The salesman accepted the offer without hesitation, apparently not wanting a 12 year old vehicle with obvious problems on his lot, but also not realizing the significance of this rare high performance SUV, especially when it did not seem so high performance at the time. So, the deal was made. Justin got the Typhoon for the \$7,000 trade-in value of his pickup. This was a great deal. A great deal, that is, if the potentially serious problems with the vehicle were of a minor nature as we hoped, or a terrible deal if not. The only way to know was to start driving north with 1100 miles to go before reaching home.

As planned, I started driving initially. We first stopped to fill the tank with premium gas which is required in a Typhoon. I told Justin that if the fuel injectors were gummed up and that was the cause of the sluggish acceleration then there should be gradual improvement the more we drive as the premium gas cleans the injectors. Also, if flat spots on the tires were the reason for the steering wheel vibration (which was a bit like trying to hang on to a jackhammer at certain speeds) then that problem should also improve as we drive. With much hope and some fear, or maybe vice-versa, we took off. I silently prayed that we would make it home, and not become stranded somewhere along the way.

The first couple of hundred miles were a bit scary, not knowing if we were going to make it back to Michigan. The engine sounded OK and it seemed to be running smoothly, but the acceleration that should have been present was just not there. The shaking steering wheel improved a little, at least when driving at certain speeds. Were we going to make it back? Since we had not slept now in about 36 hours, having left Michigan at the end of the previous work day, we stopped a little south of Atlanta, Georgia to stay in a motel for the night. We joked about the deal that Justin had made and wished we weren't so far from home.

Getting ready for bed, I noticed that Justin was wearing a nicotine patch. I told him that I was glad that he was serious about stopping his smoking habit. I was very concerned for his physical health since about 6-12 months earlier he had experienced a spontaneous tension pneumothorax.

A spontaneous pneumothorax is the rupture of a blister in the lung which then leaks air and causes the lung to collapse. This problem is very serious and requires the urgent insertion of a chest tube to relieve pressure and allow the lung to re-inflate. It is often caused by smoking, and can recur if one continues to smoke, and there is also a risk at high altitude which could prevent him from skiing in the future. When I awoke the next morning I looked at Justin, still sleeping, and felt very close to him at that moment. I wished that I could find a way to talk to him in a way that he might open up about any problems that he might be having. As I earlier mentioned, however, being a very private person and unaccustomed to discussing personal matters, I was unable to come up with the right words to say even to my son. Writing the last sentence, once again I began to cry as I realized that I felt the closest to Justin at that time than I had ever felt when he was alive, and I missed the opportunity to be the father I should have been.

The next morning we got dressed and went to the little motel restaurant for breakfast before heading home. We walked in with Justin wearing his big floppy outback hat and heavy boots, with his hair down to his waist, and a menacing looking mustache and goatee. Justin had always been very thin, but he had started putting on some weight and his shoulders were naturally broad. With his thick boots and hat it added at least 3-4 inches to his height. He must have presented a somewhat frightening countenance to anyone who didn't know him. I noticed that the few people in the restaurant kept looking over at us, especially two small children, and I joked about it with Justin. I told him that he was scaring the little kids. He grinned and we took off. If strangers only knew the kind heart and gentle, sensitive soul within, Justin would be seen in a different light.

On our trip back home, an incident occurred near the Tennessee-Kentucky border that I will never forget. I was driving at the time, coming down a small hill which curved beneath an overpass. Under the bridge was an unmarked police car. Now, I like fast cars and I like to drive them fast, but fortunately as I looked down at the speedometer, I was going the speed limit at that time. After passing the police car, however, I looked in the rearview mirror and saw him immediately pull out onto the highway. He caught up with us quickly and after following for a short distance turned on his flashers. Pulling over, I waited for the officer to walk up to the car. He came up to the passenger side window which I opened. He looked at Justin with his hat and rough appearance, then across to me and said in a strong southern accent, sounding a bit like southern cops always sound in the movies, "You boys have a tag for this here vehicle?" I told him that we had a temporary license in the rear window which was difficult to see because of the tinted glass. After walking around to the back of the vehicle to see the temporary plate, he returned to the window and looked around inside the car as he told me that we should have a tag where it could be seen. I then explained to him that my son had just purchased the car in Florida and we were on our way back home to Michigan.

The policeman seemed to be very interested in the Typhoon. He stood back and looked over the vehicle very closely, and then said, again in that southern accent, "Whatcha call this thang, a Taphoon?" I told him that it was a rare high performance SUV that was only built in 1992 and 1993 and that it was very fast. The officer stepped back again to survey the vehicle and then said, "That's a nahce lookin vehicle. Taphoon, Taphoon, I never saw no Taphoon bafuah." The way in which he said the words made it very difficult for us to keep from laughing. Next the officer looked back into the window and saw the writing on the glove box door. He stared at it a minute and then said, "Who's signatua is thayat?" I laughed and told him that it was Dale Earnhardt's autograph that the original owner had obtained. The officer immediately clapped his hands and

said, “Ah knewit,” with a big smile on his face. Having seen Dale Earnhardt’s autograph, he must have figured that we were all right because he didn’t even ask us for the bill of sale or even our identification. He wished us a safe trip back to Michigan and we were ready to go. Pulling back onto northbound I-75 and accelerating away, even without much effort on my part, the cop couldn’t keep up with us. The Typhoon was running much better and as we drove on we laughed so hard it hurt as we repeatedly recounted the incident and mimicked the cop’s words.

With each passing mile and with each new tank of premium gas, the Typhoon ran better and better. Also, the vibration in the steering wheel steadily diminished. At one point when there was no traffic ahead of us I was anxious to see how well the car would accelerate. I floored the accelerator and was pushed back in the seat as the turbocharger spooled up. I watched the speedometer go over 100 quite rapidly and with plenty to spare. Justin laughed and told me not to wreck his Typhoon. By the time we reached home the vehicle was running just like a Typhoon should. Justin had taken a big chance and it had worked out better than imagined. Our 48 hour, 2200 mile adventure had been a resounding success. Justin was excited and happy, and we had another thing in common, each of us had a Typhoon.

## Depression Returns

After purchasing the Typhoon Justin continued to do well at his job and he usually stopped by our house once or twice a week for dinner. Not long afterward however, he seemed to be complaining more about things at work and expressed a great deal of frustration with delays in work projects which he said ended up getting to him late and required long hour last minute work on his part in order to make deadlines. We were assured by Dan, however, that it was Justin himself who was putting on himself all the pressure to meet deadlines. Nevertheless, Justin felt obligated to never miss a deadline and frequently worked through the night. He often said that because of the delays, his animation work was not as good as he would like it to be.

I am not really aware of what was going on in Justin's private life during this time except that he often talked about spending a lot of time with his best friend Eric, who he had met at art school, and his wife Betty. He frequently talked about Betty cooking for him and how he enjoyed playing with their dogs. Also, for awhile he played video games and did other things with another friend. This friend, however, frequently traveled out of town on his job. In addition, Justin spent time at a brewery/restaurant playing pool. He even won a chili making contest at the brewery with Eric's help two years in a row. Perhaps because he felt out of place with many people his own age, he indicated that he often played pool with older guys at the brewery rather than go to the nearby pool hall where the younger crowd hung out. I don't think he drank excessively since on numerous occasions he made derogatory comments about drunk drivers and drunks getting into fights at the pool hall from which he stayed away. It is possible that he was drinking more on his own at his condo though. At no time, however, did he ever sound intoxicated when either Beianca or I spoke with him on the phone.

In December, 2005, despite years of exercising almost daily for my entire life, and having no risk factors for coronary artery disease other than family history, I suddenly developed chest pain while exercising. Since I had undergone a cardiac stress test which was entirely negative just three months earlier, I ignored the pain with exercise for three days. Finally, the pain did not go away when I stopped exercising and I went to the emergency room. After undergoing an arteriogram which showed multiple severe blockages, it became necessary for me to undergo emergency open heart surgery for a quintuple coronary bypass procedure. While I was in the hospital Justin did not visit me. I did not feel hurt because I knew that he loved me and I knew that it was not because he didn't care, but more likely because he was fearful that I might not make it and he couldn't face that possibility.

When I came home from the hospital five days post-op Justin came to the house after work that day. Justin's first visit when I came home from the hospital resulted in another unforgettable incident. The previous Christmas Justin had given me DVD's of an old TV comedy series called "Sledge Hammer." It was a silly spoof of TV cop shows along the lines of "Police Squad." One has to have a somewhat unusual sense of humor to enjoy such things. It was just the type of comedy both Justin and I liked to watch. Watching the DVD's was a big mistake. The episodes we watched were so hilarious that both Justin and I began to laugh uncontrollably. I laughed so hard that it felt as if my five day old sternum incision would split open. Still having a great deal of pain even at rest, it became almost unbearable as I laughed. Hugging a pillow with both arms as tightly as I could in front of me it seemed like I would pop all of the wires holding my

sternum together at any moment. The laughter caused me to begin coughing, which on top of the laughing resulted in even greater chest pain. Justin started to laugh at me which made me laugh even harder. My eyes filled with tears from the combination of the pain and laughter. I accused Justin of trying to kill me, but actually it was a benefit. My lungs were still a bit congested when I came home from the hospital and it helped me to clear the congestion. However, I don't think I would recommend that treatment for others.

While recovering from my open heart surgery, I had difficulty sleeping for the first ten days because of the chest discomfort, and during this time I read a book that my brother had just completed. His book, Three Religions One Temple Mount, The War Between Truth and Terrorism, is the culmination of my brother Gary's many years of Bible study and research. He was able to write the book while he was recovering from coronary bypass surgery himself, one year earlier. One aspect of the book related to gematria absolutely amazed me. Gematria involves using the numerical value of words to reveal hidden truth in Scripture, and is based on the fact that in both Hebrew and Greek, the languages of the Old and New Testaments respectively, numbers are represented by letters of each alphabet. Using gematria in association with Old Testament prophecies pertaining to the messiah, and New Testament fulfillment of those prophecies by Jesus, my brother was able to demonstrate remarkable correlations through the numerical values of words from the Bible.

Extensive examples provided in my brother's book show that the number 888 which is the numerical value for name of Jesus written in Greek is equal to the numerical value of Hebrew phrases from Scripture pertaining to the messiah. A brief description of this and other findings does not do justice to its significance, but suffice it to say, it seemed to me that there is absolutely no way that the correlations could be by coincidence. I have always accepted by faith the truth of what is written in the Bible regarding Jesus being sent from God to provide salvation for the world, but reading my brother's book I was overcome by the realization that he had come up with scientific, mathematical proof for the divine nature of Holy Scripture. I was overwhelmed by the discovery. Just after Christmas I called the family together to tell them of the unbelievable nature of my brother's findings. As I explained what my brother had discovered, although Justin didn't say much, it seemed in his eyes that he agreed with what I was saying.

Over the next few months Justin came to our house ever more infrequently. He often said that it was because he was busy at work, but I don't think that was the case many times. When he did visit he was often angry about things and complained more than usual. He also stopped spending time with Eric and Betty. His other close friend was out of town a lot and so Justin saw him only occasionally. Also this friend had recently married. In addition there had been numerous delays having his Cutlass painted and it was still not done one year after he had taken it to the bump and paint shop, just as the perfect weather for driving the car had arrived. Beianca and I, especially Beianca, were concerned that Justin might be falling back into a severe depression.

In mid-summer 2006 Justin was obviously depressed. On the phone he sounded down and complained that he had no friends and nothing to do outside of work. Beianca tried desperately to help him. She called to invite him to dinner frequently and she baked goodies and brought them to his condo. I tried to get him to take some time off work and offered to take him golfing. He said he had too many obligations at work, but he was not working nearly as many hours as he had in the past.

Then in mid August the Cutlass paint job was finally completed. I thought that this might raise Justin's spirits. Initially, however, Justin did not seem very excited even when he picked up his car from the painter. He had hoped to drive the car in the Woodward Dream Cruise, an annual one day event in which thousands of classic cars and hot rods cruise Woodward Avenue from Ferndale to Pontiac, Michigan. On the day of the official cruise it was raining. It cleared up late in the day and I called Justin to see if he would like to go cruise Woodward with his Cutlass. He declined, saying he did not want to take a chance that it might start raining again.

The next day the weather was sunny and clear. After Beianca and I returned home from church I called Justin again and invited him to drive his Cutlass over so we could cruise down Woodward, and this time he decided to go. Pulling into our driveway the rumble of his engine sounded great, and the bright orange Cutlass looked fantastic. Justin and I hopped into his car and headed for Woodward Avenue, knowing that there are always plenty of classic car enthusiasts not ready to quit and still out showing off their cars on the day after the official cruise. Justin now seemed to be in a much better mood than he had been for several months.

On our way through Pontiac we stopped at a traffic signal next to a car in which there were three teenage boys. Seeing Justin's classic muscle car they yelled, "Light 'em up." When the signal turned green Justin punched the accelerator and left a significant amount of his tires on the pavement as he squealed away, drawing approving gestures from the occupants of the other car when we slowed down and they caught up with us. That brought a chuckle to Justin and me.

There were many muscle cars and hot rods still cruising Woodward Avenue and we stopped at a shopping center parking lot where about 100 or more were parked. We walked around looking at all of the nice rides. After checking out all of the cars we agreed that Justin's Cutlass looked as good as any of them. He then let me drive his Cutlass home. During the drive we talked about all of the plans he had to fix up the Cutlass even more. His mood seemed very upbeat and I was glad that I had convinced him to go cruising.

## Why?

Two weeks after Justin and I drove his Cutlass down Woodward Avenue he called to tell me that he thought the turbocharger on his Typhoon had gone out. Even though he had been declining Beianca's invitations to dinner, typical of times in which he was most depressed, he did not sound as if he was very upset. After having a mechanic look at the Typhoon, it was confirmed that he would need to replace turbocharger. He initially took the Typhoon to a GM dealership but was told that they were no longer able to obtain the original part because vehicle was more than ten years old. Justin had done an internet search and located a replacement turbo charger. He needed to use my credit card to place an online order and so he came to our house a few days later where he and I went online and ordered the after-market upgrade turbocharger that he wanted. At the same time we also ordered a custom 3 inch diameter performance exhaust system which would reduce backpressure from the small diameter exhaust and give more horsepower. Justin promised to pay me back with his next paycheck. Whereas little things seemed to set him off earlier in the summer, he did not seem upset about this problem at all. He left his Typhoon in my garage and borrowed mine so that he would not have to drive his Cutlass if it rained.

Over the next two weeks Beianca continued to invite Justin to dinner at our house but he declined each time. It again appeared that he was putting a lot of pressure on himself at work. Then, on the morning of September 22, 2006, Beianca talked with Justin on the phone and he seemed to be alright. Later that afternoon Justin called me and informed me that he had contacted the company from which we had ordered the parts for his Typhoon. The turbocharger and exhaust system were scheduled to be shipped the following week. We talked for several minutes about where he could take the vehicle to have the turbocharger and new exhaust installed. Justin joked that his Typhoon would now be faster than mine. I was encouraged because his mood seemed to be very upbeat.

That day had started out clear and sunny but as I spoke with Justin it was beginning to rain. Justin told me that he had made the mistake of driving the Cutlass to work instead of my Typhoon which he had borrowed. He never drove the Cutlass in the rain and now he was forced to, but he did not sound very irritated, merely talking about it in a lighthearted way. I reminded him to be careful driving in the rain because the Cutlass certainly didn't handle on wet roads as well as the AWD Typhoon. Justin mentioned how much he liked to drive his Cutlass and expressed his desire to drive it whenever the weather was nice for another month or so until putting it away for the winter. He was also excited about getting his Typhoon fixed and anxious to see how much quicker it would be with the new turbocharger and exhaust. After our talk I felt that things were going well for him and his depression seemed to be diminishing.

My feelings of relief because Justin seemed to be coming out of his depressed state were suddenly shattered later that evening. At about 9:30 that night while I was upstairs on the computer and Beianca was downstairs watching TV, the phone rang. Beianca answered the phone and I heard her talking for just a moment and then hang up the phone. Immediately, Beianca called upstairs in a frantic voice like I had never heard before, "Tyrone, get downstairs now!" From the sound of her voice I knew something bad had occurred and thought that Justin might have been in an accident. I ran downstairs as fast as I could and my heart sank when I learned the nature of the phone call. Eric, Justin's best friend, had called and said that Justin had

called him from his car. He had driven his Cutlass into the garage at the condo and was trying to kill himself by running the car in his closed up garage. While Eric was doing everything that he could to talk Justin out of it, his wife, Betty, started driving to Justin's condo hoping to get there in time to open the garage door. Eric had called 911 as soon as Justin stopped talking, and then he called us.

Beianca and I got in the car and sped toward Justin's condo which was about ten miles away. It was frustrating because road construction was underway and we had to take a longer route than usual. About three-fourths of the way there I received a call on my cell phone from the police informing me that Justin was at the hospital where I practice. We hoped for the best and dared not fear the worst as we changed direction and drove the agonizing five miles to the hospital. I prayed as I drove. Running into the ER, we asked where Justin was and they ushered us into a conference room. I now suspected the worst. In the room was Betty, in tears and looking very distraught. She tearfully informed us that she had arrived at Justin's condo just as the police and EMS crew were pulling Justin out of the garage. She said that they immediately started CPR as they put him in the ambulance. A nurse then came into the room and told us that Justin was being treated in the trauma room of the ER and that someone would come to speak with us soon.

Having spent a great deal of time in the ER for over 30 years, I knew that it was a very serious situation. Time seemed to stand still as we waited for further information. Since I knew my way around the ER, I wanted to go back to see for myself what was happening, but I did not want to leave Beianca alone. After what seemed like a long time but was likely about two minutes, an ER physician who I had worked with many times when I was treating patients, came into the room. He informed us that Justin had arrived in the ER without a pulse, that CPR had been started immediately by the EMS crew, and had already been continued in the ER for 15 minutes. We were told that there was some electrical activity from the heart but no pulse. Beianca and I were asked if we would like to be by Justin's side while efforts to revive him continued. I knew exactly what to expect, and that it would be very difficult to see what was happening, but not Beianca. Still, we did not hesitate to go with the doctor to where great effort was being made to save Justin's life.

Walking toward the cubicle, consumed with frantic activity of ER personnel, it was a feeling of unreality, as if we were in a nightmare. Words cannot adequately describe the pain and anguish of watching life slip away from the child you love more than life itself. I prayed aloud as we watched in total helplessness while efforts to revive him continued. I kept looking up at the monitor praying that I would see evidence of a restored pulse, but none appeared. As time passed I knew that the resuscitation efforts could not go on much longer and they would have to stop. It was the most difficult thing I have faced in my life. Beianca was so shaken that I didn't know if she could handle it. This was her baby, and we were losing him.

After attempts to resuscitate Justin had continued for 45 minutes in the ER there was still no pulse. The doctor approached us and said that he was very sorry but they had to stop. The cubicle emptied of health care workers and we were left to be alone with our son. As I looked at my son's lifeless body lying on the stretcher, I felt as if my heart had been ripped from my chest. My prayers had not been answered and we lost our beautiful son at 10:23 pm September 22, 2006. With the curtain of the cubicle closed we stepped to Justin's side. We bent over and held him and kissed him. I asked God to have mercy on his soul and then we returned to the conference room. In the room by ourselves, I was totally devastated by the feeling that God had not answered my

prayers and we had lost our son. In anger I said aloud, "There is no God." Beianca responded at once, "You know you don't mean that." Immediately, I felt shame and asked God for forgiveness. Although I could not understand why Justin had to die such a tragic death, I realized that I needed God at that time more than ever.

While in the conference room a police officer came in to ask some questions and to tell us what had happened at the scene. It was then that we were informed that Justin had been involved in a minor car accident earlier in the evening. Apparently it was not serious but Justin was determined to be at fault. He had received a ticket, but no alcohol or drugs were involved and both drivers drove away. Apparently Justin could not stop in time on the rain slickened pavement and ran into a car in front of him. I can only imagine that after being in the accident, damaging his Cutlass, and feeling that he had failed, he was suddenly overcome by the negative feelings caused by the depression which had been building up for several months. There is absolutely no way to make sense of such a tragedy. Justin had so much potential, and so much to live for. He had a brilliant mind, was already quite successful in his career, was loved by his family, and even though he felt lonely, he had a number of good friends. Despite his effort to keep others at a distance by his aloofness, long hair and style of dress, people still liked him. There is no logical reason why he would want to take his life. That is the problem with depression; those affected are incapable, at times, of thinking logically.

## An Answer to a Father's Prayer

Beianca and I went home from the hospital in the early morning hours and sat in stunned silence for a period of time, knowing that there was much that we had to do. Then we began to contact family and friends, and without sleep went about making arrangements for the funeral and burial as if we were in a trance. The night after Justin's death, as I lied down in bed for the first time in 48 hours I was overcome with a wave of grief. My sorrow was not only for the physical loss of my beloved son, but even more so for the possible eternal loss of his soul. Justin had never acknowledged Jesus Christ as his savior as far as I knew. I called out to God asking forgiveness for my failure to be the Christian father that I should have been in that I had not led my son to Christ. In agony I prayed that I be given assurance that Justin was saved despite the seemingly futile request.

The next morning, after a sleepless night, I arose with a feeling of hopelessness. While sitting in the family room not knowing what to do, I had a sudden urge to go upstairs to Justin's old room in which he had not lived for three years. Stepping into his room slowly, I looked around. There on his bed was the Creature from the Black Lagoon poster which we had given him for Christmas along with some other sci-fi movie posters the year before and which he never got around to bringing to his condo to hang up in his computer room as planned. I looked at the dinosaur picture on the wall and remembered how much he liked to play with his plastic dinosaurs as a child. Next, I looked at some of the drawings and paintings he had done while in art school which were stacked in a pile. For reasons I can't explain, I then felt the need to look into the drawer of his bedside table. I sat down on the edge of the bed and opened the top drawer. Beneath a pile papers, old candy wrappers, and other junk in the drawer was a Bible. It was the Bible that had been given to me for my high school graduation by my mother. Protruding from the pages of the Bible were numerous yellow post-it note bookmarks. Inside the Bible, unevenly double folded, were several pages of paper.

Taken aback by what I saw, I picked up the Bible and the folded paper fell to the floor. I looked down and noticed what appeared to be Justin's handwriting on the paper. Since I never knew that Justin read the Bible on his own and would not have expected him to place handwritten notes in the Bible, I was a bit perplexed. As I picked up and unfolded the paper which had fallen from the Bible I realized that it was several pages which had apparently been ripped from a small notebook. The pages had been torn out in such a way that the upper right hand portion of each page was missing. Then I noticed that the missing corner for each page remained in the Bible. Reading the first sentence of one page, these initial words caught my attention, "you are quite the fellow." Who would Justin be writing to in that manner? I gathered the corners which had been torn from the pages and tried to find the one that matched the page I was reading. After locating the portion of the page that had been torn off, I positioned it against the remainder of the page and was stunned when I read the first sentence again, "Jesus, you are quite the fellow." To my utter amazement, it was a letter which Justin had written to Jesus as if writing to a friend.

Could this be the answer to my prayer for assurance of Justin's salvation for which I had prayed just the night before? Was it possible that I had been given the thing I needed most to provide some measure of comfort in a time of crushing grief and heartache? As I continued reading, it became apparent that this was a journal Justin had written in the form of letters to Jesus. From

the content of the journal it appears to have been written sometime during his final year at art school six years earlier.

In the journal Justin wrote about events in his life, some good and some bad. Many of the entries exposed the inner pain of his depression and sense of loneliness with which he lived. His kind heart and concern for others was also demonstrated. Most importantly, the journal revealed a close relationship with Jesus and Justin's fervent desire, but inability, to let others know about his faith. Yes, indeed, this was the assurance that I desperately needed to comfort me with the knowledge that Justin did not die in jeopardy of the consequences of sin. That which had been revealed by Justin's own writing was not simply a suggestion that he might have accepted Christ as his savior, I had been given absolute proof. Although my prayers for Justin's delivery from the shackles of depression had not been answered, two other prayers which I had lifted up to God had been answered. First was my prayer since Justin was a child that he would accept Christ and second was my prayer of the previous night to be given assurance of my son's salvation. This was truly a miracle which I could not have envisioned. I cried uncontrollably as I read through the pages of his journal, making it difficult for me to read through the tears.

Confirmation that Justin had accepted Jesus as his savior through his own words was only one part of an even greater miracle. On nearly all of the bookmarks which were left in the Bible specific verses were indicated. There was also a separate 2x2 inch page from a notepad upon which multiple verses were listed. This separate paper listed the number for the chapters and verses but not which book of the Bible from which they were taken. Initially, I was uncertain that the book in which the list of verses had been found was the correct one. I checked every book in the Bible with the listed number for the chapters and verses, and confirmed that it was, indeed, for the book in which it had been found. It was confirmed that the paper listed verses in the book of Job.

As I read some of the verses for which bookmarks had been placed, and apparently had great meaning for Justin, it aroused in me an overwhelming sense of sadness. However, other verses brought a sense of relief and a feeling of awe when I realized the message that had been given to me by God through His holy word. The various passages of Scripture provided a clear window into how Justin viewed his life as one of suffering and despair. There was also a veiled prediction or premonition of his early death, and yet his hope for an eternal future free of suffering caused by his inner pain. Most importantly, there were verses that revealed Justin's confidence that he would one day see God and experience the joy of heaven and assurance from God himself that my son had been saved.

## So Mistaken

Justin's chronic depression distorted the impression which he had of his self worth and how he was seen by others. His tortured mind would not allow him to feel good about himself. Before revealing Justin's journal writings and identifying the passages of Scripture which were important to Justin it is important to reveal just how wrong he was in the assessment of his life. Whereas he thought that he didn't fit in and felt lonely and without friends, nothing could be further from the truth. This was made apparent on the day of Justin's funeral. As Beianca and I did not feel that we could handle prolonged visitation time in the funeral home, or a lot of people at the service, we requested a family only visitation and service. Justin's cousin, Dan, for whom he worked, approached us and informed us that some of his employees who knew and worked with Justin were greatly affected by his passing. They had asked if they could come to the funeral home for a short time prior to the service in order to pay their respects and say a few words to us about Justin. We agreed to allow this request.

Dan's advertising agency was small and so we were expecting maybe six or eight people, but at least 30 or more came to the funeral home. Some of those who came were even from out of state. Former and current employees in the office were there. People who did not even work with Justin, but simply leased office space at the back of Dan's office building showed up. It was amazing that someone who felt that he did not fit in, was lonely, who thought that he was not liked, had so many people, some with which he had only limited contact, come to show their respect.

The people who had come congregated in front of Beianca and me and one by one, approached us and began to tell us of their thoughts toward Justin. Nearly all of them had similar things to say about him. We repeatedly heard terms like brilliant, genius, gentle, kind, funny, always willing to help. Many good natured comments about his appearance were expressed regarding his long hair and that crazy hat. Several told of their initial reservations regarding Justin because of his appearance that drastically changed once they knew him. Several, in tears, described him as their best friend and someone who was always willing to listen to them and to lend a hand. The depression that afflicted Justin's mind would not allow him to recognize that he not only fit in, he was enormously popular among those with whom he came in contact.

The funeral service was then conducted. Having received the miraculous answer to my prayer for assurance of Justin's salvation I was compelled to give my testimony to the compassion of God. Somehow I was able to keep from breaking down as I read portions of Justin's journal and the passages of Scripture he had bookmarked. Justin's cousin Corey sang a touching song that he had written. Before the casket was closed, we placed two objects inside. One was a wooden steering wheel which I had given Justin for Christmas but had never been installed in his Cutlass as planned. The second object was something Justin could not go anywhere without: his hat. Finally, the motorcade traveled to the cemetery where Justin was laid to rest next to his Papa.

## Window into the Mind and Heart: His Journal

Up until this point the story of Justin's life has been told through the eyes of a grieving, but proud father who loved his wonderful son. The story is incomplete, however, without allowing Justin's own words to speak of his struggles, which reveal the depths of despair which are often felt by someone who suffers from depression. Also, Justin's journal will accomplish something which he wanted to do so desperately. He wanted to tell others about his close relationship with Jesus Christ, his savior. In addition, through the words from Scripture that Justin found important a story will also be told. The verses for which Justin had placed bookmarks tell a story about his life, an apparent premonition of his death, and a message from Justin regarding his hope of experiencing the glory of heaven. Finally, the Word of God gives confirmation from the Almighty that Justin is now free from his inner suffering.

For me, Justin's journal provided confirmation that he had accepted Christ as his savior; the one thing which I needed to give me comfort. Others may gain insight into the kind of inner suffering caused by depression, and the realization that reaching out to someone who "does not fit in" could possibly save a life. The words which Justin wrote make it apparent to all that we can never know the secret thoughts and desires of another, and only God knows what is in one's heart. This emphasizes the need to avoid judging others.

Some of the language which Justin used in his journal is vulgar, a bad habit which he developed that was unknown to me, and some of the events he wrote about are shocking. However, his words help to reveal his state of mind, his moral character, his concern for others. Most of all that which he wrote in the journal makes apparent his struggle in the attempt to live a life acceptable to God and a desire to share his Christian faith with others. It was somewhat difficult for me to determine the order in which the pages of the journal should be arranged. I was able to place the separate pages in order according to the subject matter of which he had written and by the way in which the torn margins of the pages aligned. For each journal entry to follow, the words in italics are exactly as Justin wrote them, with the names of some people deleted in order to protect their identity.

What I believe was the first entry in Justin's journal was written on only one side of the paper, unlike every other page which had writing on both sides.

Journal Entry #1:

*For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise thee for thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are thy works Thou knowest me right well; my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious to me are thy thoughts, O God How vast the sum of them. If I would count them, they are more than the sand. When I awake, I am still with thee. Psalms 139: 13-18*

*Lord, your thoughts are truly precious to me. I am also thankful for the possession of my own. My desire would be for the two to meet, within are the thoughts given, by you, to me as well as my thoughts on those thoughts.*

Justin had copied the verses from Psalms 139, exactly as they appear in the Revised Standard Version of the Bible which I found in his bedside stand. The passage of Scripture was printed with perfectly even margins on both right and left sides and was much neater than the writing found in any other portion of his journal. To me, this demonstrated his extreme respect and reverence for the Bible. This entry in his journal was emotionally very difficult for me. As I began to read the verses which he had copied, tears welled up in my eyes. Then, coming to the part that seemed to be a veiled prediction of his death, I began to cry so hard that I could barely see enough to read: *"in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them."* I perceived these words from Scripture to be a message to me from God that in His omniscience He knew that Justin's life would be short, but also that God was giving me the assurance that He was in control and that there was a purpose for the tragedy which had occurred.

Justin's musings after the verses that were recorded from Psalms leave no doubt as to the desire of his heart which was to be in the will of God. How many of those who claim to be Christians have expressed such praise and thanksgiving to God for His thoughts that are made known through the words of the Bible? For the remainder of his life after making this entry in his journal Justin may have struggled with the ability to live up to his desire that his thoughts might unite with those of God, and as a result he may not have appeared to be a Christian in the sight of others. However, as Scripture says: *"The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."* I Samuel 16: 7 (NIV)

Journal Entry #2:

*People are a strange breed. Friendship is a desirable situation, yet times arise when more is wanted from another. The friendship is no different and yet is considered too much, or awkward with some. You know, screw this philosophical crap. I like her, not love, although I can see myself reaching that state. She has truly helped me a lot over the past few months. I guess there would be at least friendship with that. But really would anything change? Would she react any differently to me? Answer: Yes - that's a shocker - especially from me - hell I freaked \_\_\_\_\_ out. My point of the question if I ask, she would look at me differently - but the question is - yes or no - would she a) remain my friend and b) keep helping me. I know this is on her mind - not sure how but I know it is - considering she asked me about my intentions 4 times in about an hour. On that note---the other thing I know is on her mind - she thinks she has been mean to me - either I'm stupid or she is talking bad about herself. I've noticed that every time she has been mean - she has apologized or had the facial expression of "sorry" - either way - I don't see her as a mean person - despite what she thinks. I would like to bring this up with her - maybe next week. She has brought up several things for me to ponder - two really came to mind (probably because they're so recent) but still, they are good questions. 1) Who am I? You'd think that that would be easy - but it isn't. I don't really want her to tell me, but I don't know how to figure it out. A few hints would be nice... Well here are a few things I know about myself - or at least think I do. I'm really a "nice guy" on the inside, the fact is nobody really cared up until recently about a "nice guy" - They all want some sort of bad ass who can get the most drunk, break the most femurs, or swear the most, etc. The nice guy was always at the ass end of such. I've*

*forgotten or maybe never knew how to free the nice guy within. Hmph. I say that I don't care what anybody says yet I do - No idea how this can be. It seems like I should be able to fill a page with stuff about me, but I can't without really drawing straws. 2) What do I fear: I fear most everybody I know. I fear telling them about my new found faith. I fear the expectations of others if I state something like that. I fear her. Why? Because I like her company. I could easily become obsessed---but I won't. I'm not going to let her just slide past but I'm not going to be blunt, I'm just kinda seeing what happens. I also fear her because she is the only one helping me out down here. I can't lose that - I am scared of trying to find another to fill her shoes. Dan; I would like to talk to him, but not yet - he's like an upper level thing. \_\_\_\_\_: I don't know why not - I just don't see him saying much - he's quiet and reserved---I don't know how to approach, I just know how I like to be approached - her way. I fear \_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_. They've been my "friends" for a while but they aren't ready to hear about you. They would ridicule me. Not that it is that big of a deal - but right now, I don't need to be tested. On a completely different note: Why do I get so nervous around her? What is there to be uncomfortable for? True I fear her - but why do I show it? Help me out - help me feel more comfortable so that I can learn without distraction.*

This was the longest entry in Justin's journal. Expressed in his own words is confusion as to who he is, and his attempt to figure out his place in life. Whereas Justin had low self esteem caused by his depression which had resulted in him acting out in ways he knew to be wrong, he was beginning to think that he was not such a bad person. Although he had attended church all of his life, the Gospel message had not registered with him and Justin had rejected the Christian faith in which he had been raised. However, in this entry of the journal he acknowledged his new found faith, and revealed apprehension about letting others know about it. Despite Justin's fear of revealing his faith to others, he indicated a desire to increase his knowledge about what the Bible teaches through the mentoring of the girl whom he apparently had developed feelings for, making him uncomfortable. I am not exactly certain of the time frame, but not long after this entry was made the girl with whom he had discussions concerning Christian faith left her job in the same office and Justin lost contact with her. It pains me to think that things may have turned out much differently had Justin been able to develop a similar relationship with someone else with whom he could have discussed his developing faith.

Journal Entry #3:

*\_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ - sitting in the bathroom k-i-s-s-i-n-g.... or rather f---g like rabbits. I don't know what to say to him. And yes I can say "f---g". It is the best term to describe their sex. It isn't love - that's for sure. I do not like the situation---no good can come of it. What do you expect when your f---g some poor guy's fiancée? It's not right. I've told him I didn't like it - but I also say that I don't want to say anything - I don't want to be part of this. What do I do - nothing? It can't be - I have to do something before something happens. What would happen I don't know - I just don't like it - yet another topic I can think of to talk about with her. Maybe she will have advice for me. I can't make sense out of 99% of what you're trying to say. Although the last few pages aren't all too happy - indeed I am. I need to write something happy down, so I don't look back and see only bull----. (Sorry)*

In this disturbing entry Justin showed a very strong sense of morality and his concern that others may be hurt. Despite the fact that he was writing a letter to Jesus, he continued to use vulgarities, but realized this is not proper and said he was sorry. He remained a bit confused about things related to faith. Justin mentioned that he was happy at the time of this entry, and there is an

indication that he looked back at what he was writing in his journal. The reason for which he kept this portion of the journal I will never know. The fact that he wrote that the “last few pages aren’t all too happy” and I did not find any pages to match the torn edges, leads me to believe that this entry was included simply because it was on the opposite side of the prior entry which may have been more important to him.

#### Journal Entry #4:

*Some rather depressing news today. Went out to the bar with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, & company. \_\_\_\_\_ was talking about \_\_\_\_\_. Apparently after she quit her job at the strip club she needed some help from her parents, when they found out about her job they kicked her out of the house. The only way she could support herself was to strip. Finding this out her parents let her back in the house but have treated her like crap since. It isn’t helping that she drops “E” and nitrous on a regular basis now. Sad. She is such a nice girl and I don’t think it’s possible for me to talk to her - due to our past - but I still want to help, she deserves at least something. Unfortunately the one she confides in, \_\_\_\_\_ (that I know but probably isn’t much different than anyone else) only sees her as a good F---. I would like to invite her to an Aurovoir Borealis show, maybe talk to \_\_\_\_\_ - maybe a voice she would listen to. I don’t think that she is really, really bad, but a kind word wouldn’t hurt, I know how far a kind word can go - that’s what \_\_\_\_\_ done for me.*

In this entry Justin showed his kind heart and concern for others. This entry most likely was made during the time when Justin was quite depressed, and yet his greatest concern was for a girl that he felt would benefit from a kind word. Justin acknowledged that the girl with whom he had discussions concerning the Bible had helped him with a kind word.

#### Journal Entry #5:

*Sometimes you seem to be just too much. Everywhere I turn something is heard, seen or whatever that - I don’t know. It’s a reminder? Reinforcing a message. One example - While talking to \_\_\_\_\_ she brought up jazz. This made me think about buying back my Victor Wooten CD’s. One track’s intro was custom made for me: (eh, close enough) [In the journal Justin then quoted a monologue from the CD to which he referred that described seeing groups of objects where one was different from the others and the question then arose as to why anything would exist if it didn’t belong] The question is - would I have heard this if my truck was never broken into? That’s one example - I can’t even count them all. It’s a constant stream and I can’t quite know if I should try and make you stop or pour more on. Maybe a little break... but is that what I really want - or do I just fear the outcome.*

With this entry it appears that Justin was being drawn by the Holy Spirit to a closer relationship to Jesus. He felt out of place and was trying to come to terms with his growing Christian faith and attempting to figure out where he fit in. Although the thoughts coming to him were making him uncomfortable, he was eager for more.

#### Journal Entry #6:

*I am really starting to be annoyed by my own loneliness. I go out to lunch alone, I go outside to smoke alone, I drive home, go to bed alone. At times, true, I am around friends - but I don’t say much. Around \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ I at least have some sense of belonging - more than anywhere else. But even still around them I am not complete. I talk to you, and I am still lonely. Should I*

*be? Interesting. While looking for scripture I had in mind, I ran across this: "Ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" - Matt 7: 7-8 Well I'm asking and I'm seeking - two out of three says that I'm really trying to get some sort of companionship down here. But hey, I've lasted 20 years lonely, I can go on, especially with some of your help, sad yes, but who am I to bitch and moan? But, if you're going to give me something in a while - tell me. Ease my mind a little - a simple "not yet" would suffice - heck it would be fine if you said "never"- then I wouldn't have to worry about it.*

Once again the time between entries is unknown. Justin's feelings of loneliness and depression are made painfully obvious in this entry. He felt that he did not fit in and did not know what to do about it, primarily the result of the way he viewed himself with low esteem due to his depression. It is also apparent that he was doing regular Bible study on his own. Even in his state of depression and sense of loneliness, he expressed his reliance upon Jesus.

Journal Entry #7:

*\_\_\_\_\_ is getting married. Joy to her. I wonder what it could possibly be like - I have no idea. I see Craig & Starr & Ethan and I long for a taste of it. Just a taste - I'm not ready for a full plate - not until I'm out of school at the very least. But it would be nice to at least have such an opportunity to ponder about such things. Anyway, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_ I think will be a good thing. Just seeing the joy in her eyes or the spring in her step just in excited anticipation. I would like to talk to her. Not now, but in a month or so - when she comes down from cloud 9. I would like to talk about you - not force anything on her, just discuss the possibility. I think Craig brought up a good point a while back. Based on what he had seen, he said that couples that come to you seem to be happier & stay together, and that without they never really grow up - it is still about sex, drugs, booze & rock and roll - they don't get out of that phase to become a preferable spouse. It's not impossible but I don't want to see \_\_\_\_\_ dumped and screwed over - I just want to say something - anything. Just to make her at least think about it. Though I am happy for \_\_\_\_\_, this news has me a little depressed. I am just wondering when my "\_\_\_\_\_" will show up. I really shouldn't be worried - I've seen how the past has lead to the present for the better. But I can't help it. It's about that time. \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_, Craig & Starr, \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_, Justin and who? Nobody. I really don't want to continue this thought line - I just want to ask for a little taste of love. Not just my affections toward another, but the affections of another toward me. I hate to sound as though you're not enough - you're more than enough - but I don't think I'm dying soon and the voice of another would be nice. Something I don't have confusions about understanding - something to help me, help me what? I don't know...It's difficult to have you without any sense of what love can be - this crap is new to me and well I don't get it, never had it. I feel it emanating from you - but my receptors are atrophied. But thank you. Thank you for listening - If you do nothing - fine - so long as you continue to listen to me, having that knowledge is enough to ease me. Goodnight.*

What is so apparent in this entry is the depth of loneliness and inner pain that Justin felt at the time he wrote these words. It was very difficult for me to read. Having recurrent depression since his early teenage years Justin simply could not feel the same sensations of acceptance associated with friendships that others feel and thought that he would never find someone with whom to share his affection. Yet, even in his loneliness he was concerned for the girl who was about to get married and he wrote of his desire to speak with her about Jesus so that her marriage might have

a greater chance for success. He wanted to tell her about the observation his friend Craig (the son of the former pastor of the church our family attended when Justin was a child): that couples who come to Jesus seem happier and more mature, and are more likely to stay together. Justin wrote that even though he felt love emanating from Jesus, “my receptors are atrophied.” He also expressed a feeling of closeness to Jesus and said that he was thankful for the opportunity to commune with Him which provided comfort.

One sentence from this entry is most poignant. In Justin’s expression of a desire to have female companionship he wrote that he did not want to sound as if Jesus was not enough “but I don’t think I’m dying soon and the voice of another would be nice.” If he had found the companionship which he longed for, would the outcome have been different?

Journal Entry #8:

*It’s Wednesday, and this week up until now and including now - has sucked. I have felt so empty. A sharp contrast from the weekend when I felt so full I couldn’t contain it. Maybe it’s because I never moved on - I was content with the ice cube in my hand, while totally unaware of the fact I was standing on an iceberg. Monday is when it began - at the DBA meeting. Dan refers to me as the “NON.” True he has no idea but I just wanted to stand up and yell it out. I don’t know why it hurt - but since then I haven’t felt you deep within me. I want it back. Did you leave because I would not admit my faith - even to those who would embrace it? Or is it my recent fear of giving you complete control? Both? I’ve messed up - but I think Sevendust put it best: “So green I could follow, so weak I will fumble, so weak I could crumble...Wipe my face, get up again” I want to get back up. I blew it - I admit, Forgive me.*

Justin wrote of being referred to as a non-believer at an office meeting. He wanted desperately to tell others about his faith but could not bring himself to tell other Christians even though they would accept him. Like many of us he was afraid to speak up concerning his faith and the guilt had hurt him deeply. I believe that Satan, knowing Justin’s longstanding state of mind, attacked him in this sense of failure which made him feel more unworthy. Justin asked for Jesus to forgive him for not acknowledging his faith but he was determined to keep trying.

Journal Entry #9:

*I can say that I want you to control my life until I’m blue in the face - but it won’t happen - because I don’t mean it. I just can’t give it up - I’m scared. I know I shouldn’t be - you’ve brought me no adverse things, only good. Yet I am unwilling to let you bring me more. Instead I fumble around trying to appease (Not the best word, but eh, close enough) you. I can’t. Only you can do it for me. But I resist because of some sort of fear. You let me sit back, you gave some slack to me - but as soon as you tugged - I resisted, even though you’ve given me so much, I give nothing in return. I feel so undeserving, I guess that’s grace, huh? Well let’s be official - I’m sorry. I want you back in my life, this week has been miserable. I need to talk about it I need to grow - I need to move on - I need you. I want to talk to \_\_\_\_\_, to tell her pretty much what I wrote down - I just want to talk. Then I want to talk to Dan. I just want to let him know where I’m at. Then, who knows, how about the world?*

In this journal entry Justin indicated that he was struggling with allowing Jesus to take control of his life out of an unexplainable fear. He expressed thankfulness for his blessings and a feeling

that he did not deserve what he had been given. Apparently, still feeling distant from Jesus after failing to acknowledge his faith, he acknowledged his need for Jesus and a desire to have Him back in his life. Justin also expressed a desire to talk to the girl at the office who was serving as a mentor in Bible study which was indicated in other journal entries. In addition he wanted to talk about his faith with his cousin Dan. Ultimately, he wanted to tell the world of his faith.

#### Journal Entry #10:

*I'm down, and yet up. I feel that you have returned, but unfortunately, nothing has changed - except maybe a little more understanding. When I feel compelled to do something, I should do it, no hesitation. If I think - I let the opportunity slip. Like the other night. While talking to \_\_\_\_\_ I brought up Craig's quote - but I left out everything referring to you. I wimped out. Of course, I did come up with a good realization today. During the week, I doubted my faith - but during this I prayed - unconsciously proving that I am with you. I also realized that I can't quit smoking, I can't find love, I can't be anything. Only you can give me the abilities to do so. "I can take care of myself" is the greatest lie. I can't. I'm trying to be what a good person is expected to be - I'm not listening to what you want me to be. I don't feel you strongly opposing smoking, or drinking. I feel you trying to just say something - that the rest will follow. Why I keep trying to do it myself, I don't know.*

In this journal entry Justin showed an amazing degree of insight into the difficulties most people have in giving up the "self" to let God take control of one's life. He had also discovered the truth that trying to be a "good person" without first surrendering to Jesus is futile. Justin sensed the reality that if one surrenders to Jesus first, then things in one's life which should change will become apparent.

#### Journal Entry #11:

*Jesus, you are quite the fellow. This week was good. Busy & stressful yes - but good. At work, I feel something new - respect. Dan is really pushing for me to get animation going. \_\_\_\_\_ especially has been impressed with my work/ creative input. Even \_\_\_\_\_ has complemented me. I don't know why but I think it's always been there, I just never noticed. On Wednesday I did something I didn't think I'd ever do. I talked to \_\_\_\_\_. True I was a little drunk, but who cares? I talked to him about you - I think maybe a little sank into him. I know he's depressed about something - don't know what, but if you see it so that I can help I would be grateful. The funny thing is that it started when he asked me for help with his lady related problems - HA \_\_\_\_\_ asking me for relationship help? Quite the U-turn. And when he told me that he prayed the other night - I was in disbelief. He thought it was silly to tell me - but heck - I've asked for stupider things. Thanks again - Everything is kind of falling in place - I'm really starting to not worry about the opinions of others - Most of them so far have received my beliefs without problem. Thank you.*

This entry in Justin's journal was the first page that I read when I found it in the Bible, and it reveals how he communicated with Jesus as he would with a close friend. His words express a sense of happiness, a growing confidence, and acceptance by others. Remarkably, despite Justin's own struggles with depression, he noticed that a friend appeared to be depressed and asked for Jesus to assist him in helping his friend. In addition, even though he could not bring himself to tell other Christians of his faith, Justin indicated that he had been talking to his

unsaved friends at art school about Jesus. On the negative side, Justin mentions that when he spoke to his friend about his new faith he was drunk. Oftentimes people who are depressed begin to “self medicate” with nicotine, alcohol, or drugs in the attempt to ease their emotional pain. That may not be the reason why he began drinking, but perhaps it was a factor in his continued struggle with a drinking habit.

Journal Entry #112:

*Friday was fun, it could have been better. I noticed something funny to me. People there \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and a few I don't remember names were very nice to me. I don't know, I've ignored them before and have been, well, an ass to them - but do they care - nope. I just have to sit back and grin on that note. But there's \_\_\_\_\_, While I wrote that there was a long pause of me daydreaming - if you can call it that at 3:45 am. I just want to “sweep her off her feet” in the most boring words to describe it. It's even nice to be in the same room with her - It's as close as I'm going to get probably anyway. But I really just want to talk to her - I've got things that are just itching to be said. Kinda sucks that I can only go out to lunch on Friday - Maybe I'll give her a call this coming weekend - if lunch Friday doesn't happen as usual. I could also use some fresh input. I feel like I'm getting a little stale. But it's better than anything else - even if it is a little tepid.*

With this entry Justin seemed to realize that others did like him. He also indicated an attraction to the girl with whom he was having some regular deep discussions. From this and other entries it seems to be in regard to Bible study. In addition, Justin expressed a desire for “further input,” which is also apparently related to discussions of faith.

Journal Entry #13:

*I don't know why I try. I guess friendship is too much to ask for. Oh well - screw it. I need to get out of here. Seeing people I know, all around me happy. I'm guessing, if I don't know them, I won't mind. I want to drop out of CCS, quit work and smash any dreams of getting a new truck or finding someone here that gives a damn. Take my money and run. I'm thinking Texas. I can support myself. I am sick of having everything handed to me - so I'm going to bite the hand that feeds me. Work was given to me, school was given to me, my truck, computer, EVERYTHING has been given to me. I don't want this S---T. I want to own my own stuff - my stuff - that I worked for - work constantly screw social interaction - It's something I just can't do. All I truly need is you...The only friend that actually cares - too bad I can't see you.*

I am uncertain of the period of time between this entry in this journal and the prior one. Something had obviously occurred to cause Justin to despair, indicating a recurrent depression and feeling once again that he does not fit in. Even though he had been working and going to art school simultaneously he still felt unworthy and that he had not earned the things which he had. His handwriting for the second half of this entry was much larger than seen elsewhere, and was not nearly as neat as before. Even in his anger, depression, and feelings of unworthiness, however, he closed this entry acknowledging his need for Jesus, who he considered to be his only friend.

Journal Entry #14:

*Yeah, It's been a while...And yep life still sucks. My best friend f----ing the closest chance at a girlfriend and I have to suck it up like nothings wrong. I've gone out with the guy's from work a few times - but I don't belong - can't quite place why. I'm the only one who smokes, and I feel myself losing their respect with my drinking. I do have to say not all is bad though, I love my new truck - But it is only a possession, my new job description is nice, more work though. But that's it - I feel that I simply don't belong in social situations. I don't have a clue on what to do about it. I guess there is always room on earth for a fifth wheel, the useless extra, the loner. Oh well. F--- friends - enemies at least you know they intend to harm you - Friends do it out of the blue - I trust nobody now - why should I?*

Justin was betrayed by someone he thought was his best friend. The kind of betrayal which he experienced would be difficult for anyone to deal with, and for someone prone to depression, it would be a devastating act. Justin had just finished art school, was being given more responsibility on his job, and bought a new pick-up truck, about which he tried to remain upbeat and attempted to find some good in his life. However, his predisposition toward depression was just too strong.

I am uncertain whether the pages of the journal Justin left behind are the only ones he wrote or if there might have been other pages which he did not save. No other portion of a journal was found, nor did I find the notebook from which the pages had been torn. These few pages are the only evidence which confirm Justin's faith in Jesus. In the 5-6 years following the time which his letters to Jesus were written Justin showed variable degrees of depression but continued to function at a high level on his job. Perhaps he started making journal entries on his laptop computer. Unfortunately, the laptop which he used for both work and personal activity was never found. By leaving behind the pages of his journal as he did Justin must have known that eventually what he had written would be discovered. Was it his hope that the journal would be found by his mother and me so that we would talk with him about it, or was it his way of leaving a suicide note? Perhaps the only explanation is that it demonstrates the mysterious work of God which provided me with the answer to my prayer for assurance of Justin's salvation and the only way for me to find peace after the loss of my son?

I cannot answer the question as to why Justin never received from God the strength to let others know about his faith or why his plea for help in overcoming his smoking and drinking habits, and for companionship was never fulfilled. If these things had occurred, Justin would very likely still be alive. He also might still be with us if he would have acknowledged his depression and agreed to seek treatment, which then might have allowed him to talk to others about his faith and made it possible for him to feel hope. There must be a purpose for which God would allow this tragedy to happen. I may never know that purpose until my time on this earth is also done, but the proof that the work of God is displayed through this terrible situation is in the unmistakable message that I received through the passages of Scripture for which Justin had placed bookmarks in the Bible.

## Message from the Bible

I don't know what specific problems Justin may have faced in his life following the last page of his journal. Almost certainly the same struggles of loneliness, a sense of unworthiness, and difficulty overcoming his smoking and drinking habits continued, and perhaps more. His fear of being unable to live up to his own expectations as well as the expectation of others, his loneliness, his inability to stop smoking, and perhaps excessive use of alcohol were all influenced by the state of mind caused by his chronic depression. However, Justin did not give up totally in his desire to be the Christian that he wanted to be. A few weeks after his passing I was cleaning out the glove box in his Typhoon when I came across something which revealed that he was having continued communication with someone concerning the Christian faith.

I found six folded pages of paper on which were photocopies of hand printed poems related to how the struggles of life can be overcome through the grace of God and the love of Christ. The handwriting was not Justin's. On each sheet of paper the title of the poem and the date was written. The dates ranged from July, 2004, through July, 2005, which was 4-5 years after his letters to Jesus were written. Whatever Justin may have done, or failed to do beyond the time which he acknowledged his Christian faith in the pages of his journal, even taking his own life, would not remove the saving grace for which he called upon Jesus. The compassionate God of the Bible that I worship would not forsake a repentant sinner whose emotional instability prevented his spiritual growth.

Something occurred to me a few days after Justin's funeral. As I walked out into my backyard I looked out toward the wooded area adjacent to our yard; the same area where Justin had tried to hang himself when he was 14 years old. I recalled that about two months earlier while I was throwing some yard debris into the woods, I noticed that the tree in which Justin had attempted suicide was dead and had fallen over. I perceived this as a sign to me that Justin was now dead to the sin that was present in his life at that time. God had intervened when he was fourteen to prevent his suicide because he was not yet saved, but now he had been cleansed of sin through his acceptance of Christ as his savior and the natural course of Justin's depression was allowed to proceed.

The message which Justin left behind that was written in his own words would have been sufficient for me to have comfort in knowing that he had accepted Jesus as his savior and that he was trying to live according to God's will. Even more comforting was the message that I received from the Word of God as a result of the verses for which Justin had placed bookmarks in the Bible. How long after Justin had written the letters to Jesus until he placed the bookmarks is unknown. It may have been soon afterward, or even a year or more later. Some of the bookmarked verses concern topics which would be understandable for Justin to identify, but it is a total mystery as to why he would bookmark other verses.

As mentioned earlier I found a 2x2 inch paper with verses from Job listed on it. First on the list was "Chapter 7 (all)." This chapter which was obviously meaningful to Justin is apparently the way Justin viewed his life through the eyes of someone deeply depressed. When reading the entire chapter it is very enlightening and heartbreaking to feel the sense of despair which he must have felt. The following is Job 7 from the NIV translation.

1 *“Does not man have hard service on earth? Are not his days like those of a hired man?*  
 2 *Like a slave longing for the evening shadows, or a hired man waiting eagerly for his wages,*  
 3 *so I have been allotted months of futility, and nights of misery have been assigned to me.*  
 4 *When I lie down I think, “How long before I get up? The night drags on, I toss till dawn.*  
 5 *My body is clothed in worms and scabs, my skin is broken and festering.*  
 6 *My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope.*  
 7 *Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again.*  
 8 *The eye that now sees me, will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more.*  
 9 *As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return,*  
 10 *He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.*  
 11 *Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in*  
*the bitterness of my soul.*  
 12 *Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard?*  
 13 *When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint,*  
 14 *even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions,*  
 15 *so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine.*  
 16 *I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning.*  
 17 *What is a man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention,*  
 18 *that you examine him every morning and test him every moment?*  
 19 *Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant?*  
 20 *If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your*  
*target? Have I become a burden to you?*  
 21 *Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust;*  
*you will search for me, but I will be no more.*

Reading through this chapter caused me to cry bitterly as I came to realize the intense inner pain with which Justin lived much of his life. The words of this passage of Scripture not only express utter despair, but also seem to predict that Justin would have an early death. Why was Justin not healed of his depression when he called out to God for help, and from his journal there can be no doubt that his desire was to be in the will of God? Although He is able, God does not always heal physical infirmities, and for whatever reason He did not miraculously heal Justin’s mental infirmity. Certainly it was not God’s will for Justin to take his own life. However, I am convinced that Justin was saved by God, in his earlier suicide attempt, allowing him further opportunity to accept Christ. By accepting Christ as his savior he is now free of the inner suffering which he had to endure, and is free of all suffering forever. I believe there must be a reason why God allowed this to occur, and I trust that God has extended mercy to Justin because I believe the scripture that reads: *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him....”* (Romans 8: 28 NIV); and I know from his own words revealed in letters to Jesus that Justin loved God.

Additional verses from Job which Justin had indicated on the paper provide further enlightenment as to his thoughts. Some verses further reveal his deep despair.

*What is my strength, that I should wait? And what is my end, that I should be patient? Is my strength the strength of stones, or is my flesh bronze? In truth I have no help in me, and any resource is driven from me. Job 6: 11—13 (Revised Standard)*

*If I speak, my pain is not assuaged, and if I forbear, how much of it leaves me? Job 16: 6 (Revised Standard)*

*My face is red with weeping, and on my eyelids is deep darkness; although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is pure. Job 16: 16—17(Revised Standard)*

*My days are past, my plans are broken off, the desires of my heart. They make night into day; 'The light, they say, 'is near to the darkness.' If I look for Sheol as my house, if I spread my couch in darkness, if I say to the pit, 'You are my father, and to the worm, 'My mother,' or 'My sister,' where then is my hope? Who will see my hope? Will it go down to the bars of Sheol? Shall we descend together into the dust? Job 17: 11—17 (Revised Standard)*

At the time Justin placed bookmarks for these verses he was functioning at a very high level. He continued to accomplish a great deal on his job for another several years and yet it is obvious that he was living in constant emotional pain caused by his depression. Some people assume that it is a weakness of character that prevents those afflicted with depression from “coming out of it.” On the contrary, it takes great strength to live from day to day in the emotional pain which has been shown by medical research to be caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain.

Two of the verses which Justin had bookmarked demonstrated his concerns regarding the response of others if he made his faith known.

*I am a laughingstock to my friends: I, who called upon God and he answered me, a just and blameless man, am a laughingstock. Job 12: 4 (Revised Standard)*

*Surely there are mockers about me, and my eye dwells on their provocation. Job 17: 2 (Revised Standard)*

Justin was searching for answers as to how he should live according to God’s will. The next few verses show his confusion with life.

*Should a wise man answer with windy knowledge, and fill himself with the east wind? Should he argue in unprofitable talk, or in words with which he can do no good? But you are doing away with the fear of God, and hindering meditation before God. Job 15: 2—4 (Revised Standard)*

*What do you know that we do not know? What do you understand that is not clear to us? Job 15: 9 (Revised Standard)*

Another bookmark was placed directly over the following passage but without an indicated verse as was found on the other bookmarks. The manner in which it was positioned in relation to the other bookmarks that had verses written on them, leads me to believe it is related to the following verses. These reveal Justin’s search for understanding, but also the verses are a message to me that only God can know the purpose for that which occurs in our lives. More importantly, this passage of Scripture proclaims that true wisdom and understanding comes from reverence for the Lord.

*But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know it, and it is not found in the land of the living... Whence then comes wisdom? And where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of the living... God understands the way to it, and*

*he knows its place.... And He said to man, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.'* Job 28: 12—13, 23, 28 (Revised Standard)

In further passages of Scripture that had bookmarks, Justin demonstrated a clear understanding of what it means to be a Christian. The following passage had an arrow and the word “especially” pointing toward it.

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* Romans 8: 1—8 (Revised Standard)

Clearly, despite Justin's emotional struggles, it was his desire to live in the Spirit, and not in the flesh.

Several other verses which further reveal how Justin viewed his life of inner suffering and yet had hope for eventual relief from his pain were bookmarked. These verses have given me even more reassurance of his place in glory. Consider the following verses which Justin had identified with the exact verses written on the bookmarks to leave no room for doubt.

*More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.* Romans 5: 3—5 (Revised Standard)

Although Justin lived with an inner suffering most of his life this passage of Scripture reveals that he had a hope in God's deliverance. The next verse shows that he knew that there would be an eventual reward in heaven if not on earth.

*I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.* Romans 8: 18—19 (Revised Standard)

To me this is a clear message that Justin knew his earthly suffering would come to an end and that he would see the glory of heaven. In addition, it is encouragement for me that the present emotional suffering that I have due to the loss of my son cannot compare to the glory that I will share with him one day.

I believe that God gave me a message of reassurance through the other passages of Scripture that Justin had indicated with labeled bookmarks. The hand of God in the message I received was most amazingly demonstrated in a sequence of five verses from different chapters of Job. These five verses were indicated along the right hand margin of the 2 x2 piece of paper which was placed in the Bible. Each one had a “bullet” icon next to the numbers for the chapter and verse.

If taken individually, it is impossible to see how any of the verses would have much significance. Incomprehensible to me is why Justin would have identified these specific verses, and there is no way in which one might find any meaning from each verse alone, with the exception of the first verse which reveals despair. However, when taken in the sequence in which they were listed, a story is told that outlines Justin's life and provides confirmation of his salvation. When the verses are read in the order that Justin had them listed an unmistakable message appears.

In the first verse Job is regretting the night he was born. This correlates with Justin's longstanding feeling of despair.

*That night—let thick darkness seize it Let it not rejoice among the days of the year, let it not come into the number of the months.* Job 3: 6 (Revised Standard)

The second verse on the list seems to be a prediction of Justin's early death, or perhaps a premonition which Justin had.

*He returns no more to his house, nor does his place know him any more.* Job 7: 10 (Revised Standard)

Next is a declaration that in everything which occurs in our lives God has a purpose.

*Yet these things thou didst hide in thy heart; I know that this was thy purpose.* Job 10: 13 (Revised Standard)

The fourth verse indicates hope and expectation of salvation for those who seek God.

*This will be my salvation, that a godless man shall not come before him.* Job 13: 16 (Revised Standard)

It is my belief that the final verse in this list of five verses from Job to which I was directed is a message from God to me, confirming Justin's salvation. I have never heard the voice of God, but this is as close to His voice as I can imagine.

*Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he that vouches for me is on high.* Job 16: 19 (Revised Standard)

How could the message be more certain? Through these five verses I have been told that God himself, through His own word, vouches for my son, and gives me assurance that Justin was saved and is now in heaven. Truly, God is a compassionate and merciful God. Remarkably, in other Bible translations, the message from these verses is not as obvious when compared to the words from the Revised Standard translation of the Bible that Justin used. The Bible which had been given to me years before by my mother, who was responsible for my accepting Christ, was the one that was essential in providing the answer to my prayer.

Why would Justin do something so out of character and write down such intimate thoughts? Why would only the few pages of a journal be the ones left behind; the very pages that unmistakably proclaimed his faith and his desire to allow Jesus to control his life and to share his faith with others? For what reason had Justin removed the torn upper portion of the pages from the binding after tearing the pages from the notebook and then saved everything in the Bible? Why had the pages of a journal and bookmarks placed in the Bible remained undisturbed in the

drawer for three years while Justin was still at home and another three years after he moved out of our house? On another note, which has enormous implications in regard to the tragedy that occurred, why was his journal not found when Justin was alive? If it had been found by Beianca or me when Justin was still with us it would have allowed him to reveal his faith to others which he so much wanted to do, and may possibly have opened the door to help resolve his longstanding depression. I will never know the answer to the many questions which filled my mind. Only God knows the answer to these questions.

Our prayers are sometimes answered in unexpected ways. I prayed for my son's salvation and I prayed for assurance of that salvation. Both of my prayers were answered, but in a way that I wish had not occurred. I also had prayed that Justin be freed of his depression. God does not always heal physical maladies, or as in Justin's case emotional or mental afflictions. If a miraculous healing occurs, then God must have a purpose, and if healing is not provided then God must also have a purpose. For what reason Justin left us far too soon we may never know, but I will continue to trust in God that although it was not His will that Justin take his own life, at least there must be a higher purpose and some good will come from this tragedy.

I don't know if anyone will ever read what I have written in this book, but if they do, perhaps the purpose of the tragic loss of my son is that through the telling of Justin's story someone might be more inclined to accept treatment for their depression, or rely more upon the promises of God's word. Could the purpose be to caution Christians against the judgment of others based upon their appearance or habits, as we can never know the heart of an individual as God does? Possibly it is encouragement for someone to trust God with their children even when all seems lost, or proof to someone that God loves us and has concern for our suffering even when it seems we have been forsaken.

I sometimes wonder if God was trying to get my attention. Certainly, I am not a person of such importance that others should suffer so that I might get a message. Also, as I alluded to before, everyone is subject to tragedies as a result of our physical condition in this world. However, events have occurred over the years to raise this thought of a message from God. First, my father died on my birthday in 1985. In 1999, while attending a performance driving class to celebrate my fiftieth birthday, the enjoyment was lost when Beianca's father, who was like a second father to me, became gravely ill in the last stages of Alzheimer's disease, and she had to return home from the trip early. He passed away when I returned home two days later. Next, although I am still blessed with many material comforts, my plans for an early retirement were disrupted by significant losses in my investments. Then, after being in excellent health all of my life, in the span of two years I was diagnosed with a malignant melanoma which required removal, a sigmoid resection was necessitated for diverticulitis, and then I had to have the coronary bypass procedure mentioned earlier. Finally, and worst of all, I had to bury my son on my fifty-seventh birthday.

Since others were affected by some of these occurrences, I have no delusions that they were directed at me. The fact that the most significant losses occurred in relation to my birthday, however, gives me pause. Maybe God is using all of these things so that I might have a change in attitude, be more patient, become stronger in my faith, or stimulate me to be more open about my faith to people other than my family. Whatever the reason, I have confidence that God's plan is perfect and that some good will come from this terrible tragedy. Attempting to make sense of this incomprehensible loss has taught me to accept instruction from the frequently quoted verse

from Proverbs: *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding.* Proverbs 3: 5 (NIV).

There will be a hole in my heart that can never be filled for the rest of my life, but I will continue to praise and trust in the Lord as He has shown that He is there to comfort me. I had purchased a CD of a contemporary Christian musical group a few weeks prior to losing Justin. In the weeks following Justin's death I listened repeatedly to a song on that CD, and the words had great meaning for me. The lyrics of this song, "Praise You In This Storm," by Casting Crowns, speak of God being present in the storms we face in this life. The God who gives and takes away is praised, because of who He is no matter what circumstances in which we may find ourselves, and because He is always by our side to wipe our tears and provide comfort in time of need. I was the recipient of God's mercy and felt His loving presence when he gave me the assurance of Justin's salvation, and I do praise Him in my own personal storm.

The following verse which Justin indicated with a bookmark and apparently was important to him, is a message to me that helps relieve my sorrow and provides me with comfort.

*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God.* Job 19:25—26 (Revised Standard).

I believe that Justin is now in the presence of God. He no longer has to commune with Jesus through letters in a journal, but is now able to talk with his friend, and I also believe that one day we will be reunited, and join together in worshipping a loving and compassionate God.