

# HERO UNAWAWARE



**The Extraordinary Life of a Common Man  
With a Very Uncommon Touch**

**Vito R. DeLuca, Jr.**

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Published by Vito R. DeLuca Jr.

Printed in the United States of America.

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**ISBN: 978-0-615-33911-5**

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## Foreword

On a rainy day in March, 2008, while driving home from work, an overwhelming feeling of failure and sadness came over me. That feeling started to permeate my entire being as I began to realize that I had been allowing my job to consume my mind and destroy my life. Through constant worry and focus in this area, the rest of my life was falling apart.

As I sat there feeling sorry for myself these thoughts occurred to me, *What if I died today? What would my life have meant? What would people think or say at my funeral? What good would all this worrying have done? What values have I passed on to my kids? What will they think about their father when he is gone? What feelings and emotions would my wife be stuck with from my failures as she tried to raise our children if I were gone? What would the rest of my friends and family think?*

As I drove on with these thoughts swirling in my head, it became clear to me that I was failing as a husband, a father, and a friend. Though this realization wasn't a complete epiphany to me (since I had been struggling with a sense of failure in these areas for years), it was in this moment that it had hit me deeply, leaving me with an awareness that something needed to change soon, before I completely alienated the people in my life that meant the most to me.

When I emerged from this state of feeling sorry for myself, a scene flashed across my mind. It was a vision of my funeral and what that day would look like if I had chosen to live life with no fear and with a focus on the things that truly matter most.

That vision was the genesis for *Hero Unaware*: the story of who I wish I were as a man. A fictional story of who, by the grace of God, I can still be before I die.

From that thought on that rainy day in March, 2008, with many months of collaboration and effort, came the book you now hold in your hands.



## Dedication

### *To my wife, Lori*

She first caught my eye almost two decades ago when we worked together in the corporate offices of a retail lumber and supply company. To me she was the most beautiful woman I had ever met. (Just ask my sister Donna, who was probably sick of hearing me say it over and over again.) But there was something else about Lori that made her beautiful. At the time I didn't know exactly what it was but shortly after we met life decided to deal me a very difficult hand and I discovered who this beautiful woman was and why she was brought into my life.

While working late one night I collapsed in pain and was later rushed to the doctor's office when it became obvious that I was very jaundiced. Blood tests revealed that bile was backing up into my blood stream. The initial thought was that it must be a form of hepatitis but the tests could not verify this. Knowing that this condition would be fatal if not resolved, the doctors ordered every possible invasive test to determine what was causing this situation before it could poison me to death.

Over the next few weeks I was in and out of the hospital taking test after test until one test that shot radioactive dye through my bile ducts revealed that both ducts had collapsed. I will not go into the details of what it took to resolve this issue, but after several attempts to clear the blockages they finally gave up and decided to perform a complicated and risky surgical procedure to repair my bile ducts. It took over eight and a half hours to complete the surgery.

Lori and I had just met and had only been dating for a very short period of time when this happened to me. I was 28 years old and she was only 21. She was a young beautiful girl with her entire life ahead of her. The last thing she needed, or should have wanted, was to be with someone who was older than her and possibly not expected to live much longer. The weeks and months following my surgery left me partially bedridden and in need of a nurse to visit my home to redress my bandages and replace bags of fluid connected to tubes protruding from my torso. I couldn't have

expected, nor imagined, that Lori would want to be involved with someone in this state. But this is when I discovered the true beauty of the woman who would later become my wife. I also discovered the meaning of this expression: Adversity doesn't build character, it reveals it.

Like many couples, Lori and I don't always see eye-to-eye, and like many husbands, I too often fail to show appreciation for the multitude of things she juggles to make my life easier and my children's lives happier. But there is one thing I have never forgotten and for which I will be forever grateful. Lori Ann Woodside decided to stay by my side and help nurse me back to health. She later became my wife and we now have two beautiful daughters, Kayla and Chloe. Together we all share the challenges that make life the journey it is intended to be. On the surface our life together may not seem perfect, but I have come to discover that perfection is in the eye of the beholder.

Though she is still as physically beautiful to me as she was when we first met, it is for her inner beauty that my wife, Lori, is my *Hero Unaware*.

## Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible if not for the generosity of two very special people, Robert (Bob) and Paige Duncan. If it were not for their encouragement and investment in me to complete the story, this book would never have been written. I am especially grateful for Bob's attention to detail during the editing process.

I'd also like to acknowledge Alice Anderson, my writing coach and friend. Her creativity and skill helped to develop my fledgling idea into a powerful and compelling story. She is also responsible for the beautiful illustrations of the lighthouses at the beginning of each chapter. Each illustration is a pencil sketch of the lighthouse described in the accompanying chapter. If you have an idea and want to write a book let me know and I'll connect you with Alice.

It is also important that I mention one of my best friends, Robert Sperlinga, who encouraged me to go deeper into the characters' to understand who each of them really was as a human being and to use that understanding to inject real feelings and emotion to improve their dialogue. His recommendations on important storytelling elements like the need for conflict within the story and within the characters and the idea for the protagonist to have a clear call to action were critical to sharpening the final product.

Finally I'd like to thank my mother and father, Joanne and Vito R. DeLuca, Sr., for always being there for me and my sisters, Donna and Cara. Like all families we've had our challenges and things were not always perfect but in the end we always knew our parents loved us and would be there no matter what. In the truest sense this book would not have been possible at all if it weren't for them and the journey we've shared.



## Illustrations

As stated in the acknowledgement section, all of the pencil sketches throughout the book were created by Alice Anderson. Each one is a sketch of the actual Maine lighthouse mentioned in the accompanying chapter.

The book cover was designed and created by me.



# ONE

*All of life's moments are precious...*

Although the June sun was shining brightly in the brilliant blue sky there was a darkness in her soul. It was a darkness that had nothing to do with the unwanted appointment she had in less than an hour.

She really didn't want to go. But she had no choice. The sleek black Lincoln limousine was already parked in front of the house and the kids were waiting downstairs for her to join them. Reluctantly she opened her bedroom door, took a final glance in the mirror to adjust the jacket of her black suit, smoothed her shoulder-length, soft blonde hair and left the room. Joining the children in the foyer she turned to her son Daniel and looked into his eyes as she adjusted his tie and gently brushed the loose hair from his forehead.

"You look so handsome today," she said with a sad smile.

Daniel could see the emptiness in her eyes as he gently took her hand, trying not to break down and cry himself. Sarah, trembling as she witnessed this scene, began to sob as Sharon turned to reach out and pull her to her side.

"It's ok, Sarah," Sharon said in a nurturing voice.

"We're going to be okay. I know this won't be easy today but we need to help each other make it through."

Sitting in the back seat of the limo with Daniel and Sarah on either side of her, Sharon DeVitus squeezed her son and daughter's hands as the driver pulled away from the curb, drove the short distance down Meeting House Hill to the reserved space in front of the main entrance to Holy Cross Church and glided to a quiet stop. It was time for Sharon to say goodbye to her husband of 18 years. She was lost in her own private reverie and had not talked much on the ride. The children had also been quietly

absorbed in their own thoughts. The driver had respected their silence.

As Sharon stared out the window she was haunted by a memory of the parting conversation with her husband on the morning before his fatal accident.

“Sorry, honey. I’m running late. I’ll call you from the road,” Lucas said as he was rushing out the door.

“Okay,” Sharon replied, “but don’t forget to come home early. I need to run some errands and you need to pick up Sarah at six o’clock.” But by the time she reached the door he was gone. She didn’t know if he had even heard her. It was the feeling of resentment she had in that moment that she was now struggling with the most. Knowing that it was her last feeling toward him before he had died was tormenting her. Each moment of life is so precious, she thought, as another wave of emotion began to rush over her.

But just as she was about to break down, Daniel exclaimed “Wow! Who are all these people? Where did they all come from?”

“Mom?” Sarah whispered. “Who *are* they?”

Sharon’s first thought was that the driver must have taken them to the wrong church, but that was immediately replaced by the thought that there must be two funerals scheduled at the same time. But that didn’t make any sense either.

The driver stood holding the door open for them, extending his hand to Sarah who was seated on the side next to the curb. The slim and pretty 14-year-old with long strawberry blonde hair and a sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of her nose automatically took his hand and allowed him to assist her. He extended the same courtesy to Sharon, but offered no assistance to Daniel who needed no help and wouldn’t have accepted any if it had been offered. As he stepped onto the sidewalk, the 16-year-old extended his hand to the driver and expressed his thanks as they shook hands.

“You’re welcome, son,” the driver answered. “I’m sorry for the loss of your father. I’ve heard he was a great man and I’m sure he would be proud of you today.”

“I hope so,” Daniel responded as he looked into the man’s kind eyes.

“You’ll do just fine, son, just fine.” With those words he slipped an envelope into the 16-year-old’s hand, smiled, and made his way to the door of the church, where he removed his hat and sat with the other chauffeurs in the back pew so they could exit quickly to be ready to drive the mourners to the cemetery.

Standing a few feet from the limousine, Sharon had watched the exchange between Daniel and the driver and noted that her son had put an envelope into his jacket pocket. Once again she registered the thought that their son was very much like his father. He had Lucas’ build, shorter than he would have liked and slim, but that only made him try harder at sports. The girls at school all loved Daniel’s reddish brown hair and intense blue eyes.

Lucas’ eyes had been the deepest blue she had ever seen, almost indigo. Sharon had loved looking into them when they were first married and seeing the love there for her. Her own light blue eyes had reflected that intense love back to him with joy. She remembered looking into those eyes and how his strong arms would wrap around her as she nestled the top of her head just under his chin. They had always fit well together.

“I think it’s time to go inside, Mom,” Daniel said softly.

She unconsciously squared her shoulders, and linked arms with her son and daughter as they walked to the open door of the church where the priest stood waiting for them with open arms.

Father Pete had married Sharon and Lucas and had officiated at all the baptisms and other family rituals. Though Lucas had become disillusioned with the church and rarely attended, he had a very personal relationship with God and he and Father Pete had become good friends over the years. As far as Father Pete knew, Lucas DeVitus had never missed an opportunity to offer compassion and concern to anyone God had brought across his path.

The priest would never forget the profound impact Lucas had made on his own life. Pete Fletcher had been in his early twenties and Lucas was just a few years older when the two men had met almost 20 years ago, and there was an instant rapport between

them. Pete had just entered seminary to study for the priesthood after a brief career in the insurance industry, and Lucas had been sent to assess the damage on Pete's pride and joy, a fire-engine-red 1986 Thunderbird. He was sick to death over the accident that had happened on a slick back road during a howling January Nor'easter and could hardly wait to get the repairs started so he could stop taking the constant ribbing from his fellow priests-in-training. Somehow Lucas had made it all come out right and Pete (and the Thunderbird) survived. During the process of dealing with the car, the two had become close friends. It was by God's grace, not coincidence, that Father Pete had ended up at Holy Cross in South Portland when the need was created for a priest to work solely with the young people in the parish. Father Pete had never been happier in his life.

Yes Lucas was a man who was truly going to be missed. He would do his own grieving for his friend later. But, like Sharon, Daniel and Sarah, Father Pete was also blown away by the number of people filling the pews to pay respect to the quiet man who seemed to draw (and to be drawn to) people in need.

Once the family was seated, Father Pete took his place at the pulpit and began conducting the mass. The rest of the service fell into place with appropriate Bible passages being read and the soloist's beautiful rendition of

*If I Can Help Somebody*, made famous by Mahalia Jackson.

*If I can help somebody as I pass along,  
If I can cheer somebody with a word or song,  
If I can show somebody he is trav'ling wrong,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

*Then my living shall not be in vain,  
Then my living shall not be in vain;  
If I can help somebody as I pass along,  
Then my living shall not be in vain.*

The familiar words and order of service soothed the congregation as ritual and liturgy reassured them that God was indeed in their midst as they said goodbye to a good man.

At the end of the service Father Pete led the recessional line as Lucas' casket was lifted onto the wheeled cart by the pallbearers, and holding hands, Sharon, Daniel and Sarah followed the casket slowly down the aisle and out of the church to the waiting hearse. The congregation silently stepped into line behind the family and followed. Once the casket had been settled in the hearse, their driver escorted Sharon and the children to their limousine. The police escort set the dignified and reverent pace with the hearse next, and then the limo carrying the family to a place none of them wanted to go as the procession escorted the body of Lucas DeVitus three miles through the city to Calvary Cemetery.

The graveside service was short with Father Pete offering a prayer of committal and Sharon, Daniel and Sarah each dropping a yellow rose onto the top of the casket before it was lowered into the ground.

"Yellow roses were his favorite," Sarah said aloud, choking on a new wave of tears.

"Yes, they were," Sharon agreed, offering her daughter a fresh tissue as she gently squeezed her shoulder.

Most of the mourners who had accompanied the family to the cemetery began to leave. Some simply offered quick condolences and walked away to their cars. Some stepped up and spoke kindly for a few minutes to the DeVitus family, offering their sympathy and making a kind remark or two about what a fine man Lucas had been. A few recounted short anecdotes or something funny or comforting they remembered about Lucas. Most were complete strangers to Sharon who was surprised to see how devastated some of them seemed to be. Eventually the last of the crowd began making their way back to individual cars. A small group of people seemed to be holding back, however, waiting for an opportunity to speak more privately to the family. Without discussing it the DeVitus trio simply stood still, giving them all a silent invitation to approach.

The first to reach them was a tall, silver-haired woman who walked with the aid of an ornate gold-handled cane. She introduced herself as Helen Armstrong and handed a sealed letter-sized envelope to Sharon.

“My Dear, I am so sorry for your loss,” Helen began. “I met your husband when he spent one night at a bed and breakfast I used to own on Isle au Haut in Stonington.”

“Is that the one that used to be a lighthouse?” Sarah asked.

“You’re right, Sarah,” Helen responded. “Did your dad tell you about staying there?”

“He told me how much I would like it and that he would take me there someday.”

Helen hesitated as she saw the sadness in Sarah’s eyes, knowing that her heart was breaking as the words fell off her lips. Before they both broke down in tears, Helen took her hand and continued.

“Unfortunately, Sarah, I don’t own it any longer, but I’m sure the new innkeepers would love to have you and your family visit anytime. It really is a lovely place and I truly miss it. I wanted to tell you how much Lucas changed my life.” She made eye contact with each of them briefly.

“I knew a lot of people would want to talk to you after the service and I didn’t want to take time away from them, so I’ve written it all down for you in what turned out to be a rather lengthy letter. I thought it was important for you to know how much it meant to me that he would take the time to help me heal from an old emotional wound I had been ignoring for many, many years. He did something for me that no one else had ever taken the time or the interest to do, and I’m extremely grateful. My address and phone number are in the letter. Please let me know if I can do anything at all for you.”

Helen turned and walked slowly toward a white limousine as her driver came to assist her. She graciously accepted his arm then turned and gave a respectful nod to Sharon, Daniel and Sarah who nodded back.

“I wonder how Dad changed that woman’s life?” Daniel wondered aloud.

But no one had time to comment because immediately in front of them was a short, rotund middle-aged man with not one hair on his entire head. He was wearing thick-lensed wire-rimmed

glasses that he repeatedly removed and returned to the bridge of his nose while he spoke to them.

“My name is Donald Paulson and I want you to have this.” He handed Sharon a sealed nine-by-twelve manila envelope. I am a professor of biology at the University of Maine in Portland. I would never have become a professor of anything, much less of biology, if it had not been for a random conversation I had with Lucas about nine years ago. I shall miss him greatly. You have my deepest sympathy.” Without giving them a chance to respond, he reached out and shook each of their hands, turned on his heel, and walked away as the next person approached with full hands, one of them holding the hand of a young child and the other holding a small but thick envelope which she handed to Sharon.

“I hope I’m not intruding, but I felt so strongly that I should be here today, not just to honor Lucas, but to let you know about the incredible gift he gave me. I’m Nancy Stanhope and this is my daughter, Madison. The gift Lucas gave me wasn’t anything I could hold in my hand. It was something I could hold in my heart and it has made all the difference in the world to both me and Madison.” The little girl who obviously had Down Syndrome looked up and smiled crookedly at the mention of her name. “Lucas didn’t spend more than five minutes with me that day we met at the local grocery store in Port Clyde, but what he said to me changed me forever. He saved my sanity, and gave both me and Madison a truly happy life. Please accept our sympathy for the loss of a truly wonderful man.”

For almost an hour they came, one by one. Some said a few words and left. Some chatted for a few minutes with them. Each had an envelope to deliver. Each had kind words to say about Lucas. Some hugged Sharon and patted the arms of Daniel and Sarah. Some hugged the kids and patted Sharon’s arm. They all made an unforgettable impression on the entire DeVitus family.

The last person to say goodbye to the family was Father Pete. After hugging all three of them, he removed an envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket and handed it to Sharon with no explanation except the words, *This may explain some things about Lucas you may not understand.* When that last envelope had been pressed into Sharon’s hand and Daniel’s suit pockets were bulging with the

ones that wouldn't fit into Sarah's or Sharon's purses, Sharon turned to them and said, "Come on. It's time to go home."

Then they saw her. She was standing alone at the far edge of that section of the cemetery. Dressed totally in black from head to toe, wearing a wide-brimmed hat that shaded her face with a heavy veil that obscured her features.

Sharon's heart dropped to the pit of her stomach as she wondered who this woman could be. Sensing their mother's nervousness, Sarah and Daniel drew tight to her side to support her. As the three of them stood still, not knowing quite what to do, the woman in black began walking toward them. They waited where they stood. She stopped about three feet in front of Sharon, within comfortable speaking distance but not close enough to reveal what she wanted to hide—her face.

"I'm sorry to intrude on your sorrow," she began in a quiet and gentle voice.

"It's all right," Sharon responded, trying to put the woman at ease.

"I read about your husband's death in the Press Herald. I want you to know that I would not be alive today if it were not for him. This letter will explain it all. Please forgive me for making a scene during this difficult time in your life. I tried to be as unobtrusive as possible, but I don't go out in public without a heavy veil because my face was disfigured in an accident. I apologize if I startled you."

"It's all right," Sharon repeated, trying to take in what the woman had said. Before she could say anything else, the woman turned and walked across the road to where her car was parked. She removed the veiled hat when she was at a safe distance and drove away alone.

Without saying a single word, the three remaining members of the DeVitus family walked to their waiting limousine and allowed the driver to seat the two women in the back. Daniel chose to open the front passenger door himself and sit with the driver in the front. No one thought it was strange that he did that. Somehow it just seemed right, especially to the driver, who knew more about this young man than anyone could have guessed.





# TWO

*Your choices dictate your destiny...*

Lucas DeVitus had never had it easy. Growing up in the inner city had made him tougher, but it had not made him tough. Underneath the bravado was a little boy who couldn't understand the cruelty he saw in the world and it was his sensitivity to this that made him cry out for understanding at a very young age. Life would have certainly been easier if he were more like the other kids who seemed to be unaffected by the inequities of the world, but then, he wouldn't have been Lucas.

He had inherited his biological father's sense of adventure and his mother's determination to survive no matter what life threw in her way. A few days after Lucas was born, Henry Willinger took one look at his red-faced, wet-diapered crying infant son and decided in a heartbeat that the domestic life was not for him. He took off, never to be heard from again. Anne DeVitus took one look at her beautiful infant son and decided in that same moment that she would do whatever it took to raise this boy to be a caring and successful human being—unlike his father. And it had taken a lot, including reserves of inner strength that Anne didn't even know she possessed.

By the time Lucas entered kindergarten at the Rosa E. True School on Park Street in Portland, Anne had done whatever she had to do to put food on the table and clothes on her son's back. She had also taken him to church every week, prayed with him every night before he went to sleep, and left him to the watchful eye of the neighbor across the hall while she worked the night shift at a local commercial laundry. She slept while Lucas was in school. On her day off she took him on what she called big adventures. A bus trip to the amusement park and pier at Old Orchard Beach where Lucas reveled in riding the black horse with the red saddle on the merry-go-round once a year. A train trip to Saco to pick

blueberries on the pole line where the picking was the best and the berries were the juiciest. A walk to the library to borrow five books and return the five from the week before. Saturday supper was Lucas' favorite: baked beans from the slow-cooker and fresh home-made bread made from scratch by Anne when she returned from work early Saturday morning.

There were other friends to help out, too. Several older women in the neighborhood unofficially adopted Anne and Lucas. He learned something from each one of them. From Maggie (diagonally across the street) he learned that people are basically caring and sometimes needed each other to make it through life successfully. From Rosie (called that because she always looked as if she had fallen into a bucket of rouge), he learned that life has its ups and downs and the best way to cope with the downs is to make the most of the ups. From Jeanette who worked beside her husband in their grocery store, he learned that hard work brings its own rewards of self-esteem and a healthy sense of pride. All of these women had a great influence on Lucas' self-image and moral standards.

The men in Lucas' life were solid citizens in the neighborhood: Jeanette's husband, Malcolm, owned the grocery store and sometimes hired Lucas to sweep the floors and take out the trash on Saturday mornings. The local barber shop was also a source of male role models for Lucas. He loved to just sit and watch Joe, the barber, work magic with his scissors and razor. One day Joe surprised everyone by escorting seven-year-old Lucas to the big barber chair, slapping a hot wet towel on his face and shaving his peach fuzz as if he were a grown man. Lucas had laughed out loud through the entire event. And so had the other men in the shop. It was the very first time Lucas had ever felt a natural camaraderie (later labeled *male bonding*). He didn't realize he had been lacking in that area until that day. And then he couldn't seem to get enough male bonding to satisfy himself. So at age twelve he joined a gang.

It wasn't called a gang; it was just a club for young men. And it really was just that. This was no street gang with violent activities and predatory crimes. These kids didn't hate people; they just joined together to try to figure out how to handle life's challenges and to have some fun along the way.

They built a shack down by the railroad tracks and called it their clubhouse. Together they chose a name, the West End Reds (West End because that's the part of Portland they all lived in and Reds because they were all required to wear something red to every club meeting or activity). The Reds (as they became known locally) were equally quick to spray a shop-owner's windows with shaving cream on Halloween or to wash those same windows at no charge just to do something good for the neighborhood. The reason for this unusual *modus operandi* was simple: All of the members attended St. Dominic's church regularly and Father Francis was a role model well loved by all of them. A couple of them were even altar boys. No one wanted to ever disappoint Father Francis, known affectionately as Father Frank to every parishioner. Each of the members of the club had at least one parent who was actively involved in his or her boy's life and all of the parents were aware of the Reds and approved of the friendships among the boys. The Reds were a force for good in the neighborhood. And Lucas was right in the middle of it all, learning what it meant to be a man and stand on his own two feet, regardless of the fact that he had no father in his life.

But there were several father-figures, most notably the high school football coach who just happened to live in the apartment across the hall from Anne and Lucas DeVitus. Although Lucas was not tall and burly, Tom Richards saw something in the boy that made him spend extra time with him. That investment paid off for both of them.

In spite of all the good influences, however, Lucas still felt an unexplainable emptiness inside. He knew something was missing in his life, but he couldn't put his finger on it. He had many long talks with Father Frank about this very subject, some initiated by Lucas and some initiated by the priest.

Lucas was driven to perfection. He didn't know the meaning of the word quit. Even when he felt beaten down and ready to throw in the towel, something inside him welled up and the force of it pushed him to try even harder. Even when his efforts backfired a few times, Lucas never stopped giving his best effort to achieve whatever goal he had set for himself, unrealistic though it might be.

Injustice made Lucas feel angry, even though Father Frank would continually remind him that anger could be self-destructive in the long run if not kept in check. This anger created a burning passion that drove him to try to right the wrongs he could do something about. Father Frank was well aware of this passion that drove Lucas to not only take risks but to also put himself in harm's way. He had watched the young boy grow into a courageous adolescent and had encouraged him to join the West End Reds, giving the priest the opportunity to be more involved in the boy's life, since the club was part of St. Dom's outreach to the youth of Portland. He knew that having no father in the home had left a huge hole in Lucas' heart and had been a strong determinant in forming Lucas' character. In his heart, Father Frank felt a love and affection for this boy with the caring personality who put feet to his desire to right the injustices of his world. He also knew that underneath it all was a grieving child who keenly felt the lack of a father's love, making Lucas believe that somehow it was his own fault that his father had not loved him enough to stick around and help him grow up. Father Frank knew this was keeping Lucas from connecting to God and he intended to do everything in his power to counteract what Henry Willinger had set in motion the day he walked out of that apartment and let the door slam on his infant son.

One way the priest had tried to support Lucas was to introduce him to lighthouses. There were 77 lighthouses guarding Maine's coast and they represented safety and security to those who depended on them to guide them past dangers invisible to the human eye. They were also solitary and lonely symbols that reminded Father Frank of his own childhood, so similar to the life Lucas had known so far. The endurance and strength so evident in the boy was both an inspiration and a challenge to the shepherding skills of the pastor as he watched him grow into an exceptional young man. So it was a calculated move on Father Frank's part when he suggested a field trip for the West End Reds to Portland Head Light in Cape Elizabeth. The Reds accepted with great enthusiasm and chose the second Saturday morning in July, two weeks away, when high tide would occur at 10 A.M.

The weather on the day of the trip was perfect. Bright sun danced off the crest of the waves being driven onto the rocky

shore by the incoming tide. Seagulls hang-gliding on the wind currents overhead shared the daily gossip in their raucous cries as the boys and Father Frank clambered over the rocks to play catch-me-if-you-can with the crashing waves. Getting soaked was part of the agenda.

Just before noon Father Frank gathered his flock of sea-soaked young men on a grassy area near the parking lot, but far enough away from the other visitors to give them some privacy. The other part of the priest's agenda was to have a serious talk with The Reds about their individual relationships with God. He was, after all, their spiritual mentor and he took that calling to heart. When he had their attention, he began with a short illustration based on lighthouses.

“Okay, men. Listen up. What makes a lighthouse a lighthouse?”

Several spontaneous and obvious answers were offered: *The light. The house. The location on the rocky coast.* Then came the answer he had been hoping to get: *The need for a lighthouse in the first place.* It was no surprise to Father Frank that this came from Lucas.

“Absolutely right! Could any old house with a light in the window be a lighthouse?”

Back came the responses: *No...well, maybe, because the light would show a little from out at sea, but probably not enough to be a help in a storm.*

“So what's different about *this* house with a light in it?”

“It was built to be a lighthouse on purpose.” Again it was Lucas.

“Right. It was built *for a purpose.* It has a job to do while it exists. It's an important job and in this particular place there is no other house that can do the job as well as this particular one. Why is that?”

Several of the boys offered reasons ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous: *It's the only one here. The light is big enough to be seen a long way from the shore. George Washington thought it would be a good idea and ordered it to be built.*

Father Frank pounced on the last statement, offered by freckle-faced Timmy Steele who was already a history buff at the age of 13.

“Good point, Timmy! Portland was a busy port at that time but there was not even one lighthouse in all of Maine. After two people died in a shipwreck, Congress agreed to build a lighthouse. It wasn’t enough money to do the job, so nothing happened until 1790. The lighthouse you see right over there was finished in 1791. So you’re right, Tim. President George Washington did think it was a good idea and he told Congress to go ahead and spend the money in order to save lives and protect people and ships from danger. That lighthouse was built for a purpose and it has done its job very well for over two hundred years.”

All the boys turned to look at the lighthouse as Father Frank pointed to it. Then he pressed his point home.

“Do you know that each of you was also created for a purpose by the creator of the universe? Who would that be?”

“Must be God,” Jimmy O’Connor tried to joke.

“Right!” Father Frank grinned in response.

“God decided that the world was going to need a Jimmy O’Connor and decided to create him for that specific purpose. He has a job for you to do, Jimmy, and you are the only one who can do it. Do you believe that?”

“Nope,” Jimmy answered honestly, all joking aside. “Why would God do that?” Father Frank smiled at the boy, said a quick prayer for guidance and plunged in.

“Because He has a plan for your life and it’s a good one. He has people for you to help, jobs he wants you to do, and lives he wants you to touch in so many ways it would blow your mind if you knew them all. After all, God has no hands of His own, so he *has* to use yours and mine to do what He wants done in this world. Do you believe *that*, Jimmy?”

“I guess so, Father. If you say so, it must be true. Right?” Everyone laughed, including Father Frank.

“Thank you, Jimmy, for that vote of confidence! I pray every day that I will always be true to God and be alert to people around

me who need help. It doesn't have to be a big thing like saving someone's life or anything like that. Helping someone might be as simple as giving people a little encouragement or hope when they are down on their luck. Or saying a kind word to someone who is hurting inside. Or sharing half of your Hershey bar with someone who doesn't have one. Each of us is here for a reason and since we usually don't know ahead of time what is going to happen to us or the people in our lives, we need to always be ready to lend a hand or say an encouraging word to everyone we meet." Joe Descantio looked at Father Frank with a puzzled expression.

"What if you don't even *like* that person?" Some of the boys snickered.

"It doesn't matter. You do it anyway, because he or she is a person who makes mistakes, just like you do sometimes." Everyone grinned because they all knew that Joe had a talent for getting into trouble easily. At one time or another, all of them had to either help Joe out of trouble or suffer the consequences for getting into trouble with him. "You do what God would do if he were standing in your shoes, because to tell you the truth, boys, if you believe in God, he *is* standing in your shoes. Don't ever forget that. And don't ever forget that you were created for a purpose: to do what God would do if he had hands and feet on this earth."

Lucas was listening but something inside wasn't connecting. He wanted to believe Father Frank but something beneath the surface of his mind was blocking him from fully receiving the message. It was like an indescribable darkness pulling on him, blocking him from seeing. Father Frank noticed Lucas lost in thought.

"What's on your mind, Lucas" Father Frank interrupted.

"Huh?" Lucas said as he realized he was lost in thought. "Ahh... Nothing, Father... nothing."

"What do you think of what I just said?" Father Frank continued.

"I don't know, Father Frank. I'd like to believe what you're saying but something inside of me won't let me."

"And what do you think that is?" Father Frank said as he turned to face the boy and looked him directly in the eyes.

“I don’t know. I just don’t know” Lucas said anxiously as he looked down trying to keep Father Frank from seeing his thoughts.

“Are you mad at God, Lucas?” Father Frank asked. As the question rolled off his lips Father Frank knew the response would be difficult for any young boy to answer, especially to a priest.

“No!” Lucas burst out, as he got up and ran to the edge of the water.

“I’m sorry boys. I’ll be right back.” the Father said as he stood up to follow Lucas.

Lucas made it to the water’s edge and was standing with his hands in his pockets as he kicked back the waves. Father Frank came up behind him and put his hand on Lucas’ shoulder.

“Do you want to talk about it son?”

“I don’t want to be mad at God” Lucas said as he started to break down. “But why would he take my father from me and leave my mother all alone?”

“Oh, Lucas,” Father Frank groaned, praying that God would give him the wisdom to free this boy from his pain. “God didn’t take your father from you and your mother. God gave your father a choice, just as he gives each and every one of us a choice in every moment of every day.”

“What kind of choice?” Lucas blurted out “A choice to be a jerk?”

“That’s exactly right!” Father Frank smiled. “A choice to be a jerk—or not.”

Surprised that the priest agreed with him, Lucas stopped fidgeting and glanced up questioningly.

“Why would God do that?” Lucas said.

“Because he really had no alternative,” said Father Frank “If there really is a loving God, what else could he do? If he didn’t give each one of us a choice to choose between right and wrong we wouldn’t be free. We would all be robots doing God’s will. That, my son, would not be a loving God, and it would certainly not be a God I would want to follow.” Still a bit confused and needing to know more, Lucas turned towards Father Frank.

“Fine, but if he is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-caring, why would he let this happen if it would hurt others?”

“An ever-loving God creates man,” said Father Frank as he felt the Spirit speaking through him “and, like any good father, he teaches him right from wrong and then sets him free to make his own choices in life. Though the father would love to make all of the child’s choices for him—out of love, to keep him safe—instead, he sets him free to choose on his own. For a life without choice is no life at all. You see, Lucas, God is not who you think he is. By the way, just to be clear, he's not even a *he*, nor is he a *she*. Most people want to know why God would allow bad things to happen in the world, because they have a preconceived notion of who and what God is from whatever religion they subscribe to or whatever their parents told them. Most were taught that God is all-powerful, all-present, and all-knowing, and is a force for good, so they question why he would allow something bad to happen if he has the power to stop it? But this is not God's role. God has no role beyond pure consciousness and love. He is that he is or, as God would say, *I am that I am*. God is pure consciousness, an immaterial intelligence.

“The world we live in and the universe we live in is a small tiny piece of this all-encompassing indescribable intelligence. So when this indescribable intelligence decided to organize a bunch of indescribable stuff into the universe we live in, ...and so on ...and so on ...and so on, until He organized this stuff into a human being, He had a decision to make: Do I program these beings to do and say what I choose or do I imbue them with my consciousness and then give them a choice? This is what is meant by being created in the image of God. If He made us all slaves of his will there would be no choices and there would be no freedom. The crazy thing is that God had to allow for evil in order for us to have freedom and free will. Without evil (or wrong choices) there is no option for choice and there is no chance for freedom. Otherwise we would all be unconscious slaves to God's will. This is essentially what animals are. They have spirits but they are not conscious. They have no choice. They are slaves to the environment dictated by how they were programmed to be.

“In the end, Lucas, we are all just players on a stage and we have been given the chance to choose right from wrong, good from evil. Once we exit this stage we will move to eternal life and

the choices we make here will decide whether or not that is a pleasant experience or a hellish one, thus the experience of heaven or hell, which people experience every day on this earth.

“Lucas, my boy, here is the secret to realizing the existence of God:

“Once you accept that God is NOT who or what you think he is, you can then allow yourself to see who he really is. As of now, you are in judgment of God. *But know you are forgiven.* And once you realize that, you can stop to discern who God really is. You can do this in silent prayer. As the scripture says, *Be still and know that I am God.*”

The priest’s eyes seemed to penetrate to the very soul of Lucas as they locked eyes and held their gaze. In that moment something happened inside Lucas that set his feet on a path he would never have chosen otherwise. It was a life-changing, life-directing decision that would prove to be both his greatest source of fulfillment as well as one of disappointment and pain.





Marshall Point Light

# THREE

*What if everything were perfect...*

At 7:30 A.M., on the first morning after Lucas was laid to rest, Sharon acknowledged that it had been another night of no sleep. She had tossed and turned all night, desperately seeking a calm that would allow her to sleep for the first time in more than 36 hours. Most of the night she continued to ask herself the same questions over and over, hoping for someone to answer.

"What will life be like without Lucas?"

"How will the children survive this?"

"How could he...?"

As the morning sun started to rise, Sharon realized she had a strange question in her mind, *How could he leave me?* Though she knew that he didn't choose to leave her, the strange question kept popping up in her mind. She realized that people very rarely had any choice when they died, especially where accidents were involved, but maybe this odd question kept coming at her because Lucas had so much to live for and his death, like most unexpected deaths, made no sense at all. There was still so much they needed to do. And the children needed a dad.

*I just assumed we would grow old together, she thought. I can't believe I have this strange anger toward him as if he deliberately chose to leave me.*

"Oh God," she whispered aloud, "this is difficult enough to deal with, please don't let me lose my mind,"

Sharon tried to rationalize how this could have happened. But no matter how she tried to answer her own question, it made no sense. There was no reason Lucas should have been taken from her, from her children. Not now, not so young. It was so sudden, so unexpected. Something nagged at her insides that there was something more to this.

She didn't know exactly why, but Lucas' dying in an accident just didn't make sense to her. The call she had received yesterday from Lt. Matt St. Pierre of the Rockland Police Department had raised some suspicions within her, and although he explained the reason for his call as being standard procedure, she still sensed there was more to it than the Lieutenant was telling her. However, as she thought back to the call, his benign questions really didn't seem like he was hiding anything or thinking that anything out of the ordinary had happened.

Sharon glanced over at the bedside clock on Lucas' side of the bed, where her daughter was starting to wake up. Sarah was having a very hard time with her father's death and she didn't want to sleep alone in her room. It was now almost 8:00 A.M. and as good a time as any to start the day. Sharon took her daughter's hand and said, "Let's get Daniel and head down for breakfast." As they came out of the bedroom, Daniel was already making his way to the kitchen in their three-bedroom ranch near Willard Beach. All three of them looked as if they had not slept much the night before. Sharon drew both of her kids into her arms and felt their arms go around her as they comforted each other without saying a word.

Daniel pulled away first. "Mom?" He asked. "What are we going to do with all those letters we got yesterday? We can't just leave them in a pile on the dining room table."

Sarah shared her thoughts. "Maybe we should open one a day until we get through all of them. There must be something special about them or those people wouldn't have taken the time to write them and give them to us."

"That's a great idea!" Sharon responded. "I like it. Let's start this morning and just pick one out of the pile at random. How would you two feel about having a special breakfast together each morning until we have read all the letters together? I'll even set the table with the good china and crystal. I think it will help us all get through this a little easier together. What do you think?"

"I'll set the table, Mom. You do the cooking, okay?" Daniel called over his shoulder as he went to get the linen napkins and placemats that were normally saved for special occasions.

“I’ll get a fresh rose from the garden,” Sarah added as she took a sharp gardening knife from the mudroom and filled a budvase with water.

“How does French toast stuffed with fresh peaches sound?” Sharon asked as she pulled the large skillet from the cupboard beside the stove. Sharon loved to make special breakfasts for the family. She knew it would be difficult without Lucas being there.

“Super!” both kids said with an immediate pang of sadness. It had been their father’s standard reply to whatever their mother had suggested. *This is just what we needed today*, Sharon thought with relief. *This will be something to pull us together and get us past these first hard days and figure out what we do from here. I’m sure those letters will be just simple remembrances of Lucas and the little ways he reached out to people, but reading them together and spacing them out over the few days will be good for us.* She unconsciously ran her fingers through her hair, tightened the ties on her robe and turned the heat on under the skillet as she began pulling the breakfast ingredients from the cupboards. *Dear God, please just get us through this!* she whispered in the empty kitchen.

“Mom, look at this perfect yellow rose I found!” Sarah was smiling—her face streaked with the evidence of tears—as she entered the kitchen with the most beautiful yellow rose she had ever seen or smelled. “Dad would have loved it!” She held the budvase for Sharon to sniff the sweet perfume.

“Yes, he would,” Sharon agreed with a smile as a tear escaped from her eye and made its way down her cheek. Without thinking Sarah reached out and brushed it away while saying, “I’ll make the coffee for you.”

Sharon just nodded and turned back to preparing breakfast, only to have her thoughts interrupted by Daniel who called out from the dining room, “Hey, Mom! Don’t use every dish in the cupboard, okay? Sarah and I have to do the cleaning up, remember? Give us a break!”

Sharon choked on a chuckle as she brushed another tear from her cheek. She forced herself to hum a few lines from the song that had been sung at the funeral the day before: “If I can help somebody as I pass along, then my living shall not be in vain.” *Lucas certainly lived by those words*, she thought. He was always

reaching out to help people wherever he went. Without warning she broke down and sobbed uncontrollably. She didn't even notice as Sarah took the spatula from her hand and turned the French toast over in the skillet. She vaguely felt Daniel's arms go around her as he handed her a tissue and awkwardly patted her back, letting her vent her grief.

"It's ok, Mom," he whispered. "It will be ok."

Sharon managed a small smile at the new man of the house and reached out and gently squeezed Sarah's shoulder as she flipped the French toast onto the plates. "Thanks, you two," she managed to say as she poured three glasses of juice and carried them into the dining room on a small tray. "Breakfast is served!"

After the breakfast dishes had been rinsed and put in the dishwasher, they all returned to the dining room table to the pile of letters waiting for them. For a few seconds they all just gazed at the envelopes of all different sizes and colors, wondering which one they should open first.

"How should we do this?" asked Sarah. "Smallest one first?"

"Let's not make this too complicated," Daniel groaned at his sister.

"I have an idea," Sharon offered as she left the table and opened the door on the bottom of the china cabinet. She returned with the crystal punch bowl and set it in the middle of the table like a centerpiece. Scooping up the pile of letters she dropped them into the large bowl and gave them a stir with her hands. "There are three of us, so why don't we rotate who chooses the letter of the day?"

"Good idea," Daniel agreed, wanting to get started. "Mom, you should go first because you knew Dad longer than we did. Then I'll go next and Sarah can go third. Then we'll start the rotation again. Okay?"

"Okay," Sarah and Sharon agreed.

Sharon hesitated only briefly as she closed her eyes and reached into the punch bowl and pulled out the first envelope her hand touched. It was a small but thick envelope the size of a greeting card. She glanced at her children and Daniel said, "You

picked it, Mom; you should read it. I guess that's how we should do it. Whoever's turn it is to pick should read the letter"

"Fair enough. Here goes," Sharon responded as she used the letter opener Sarah had thoughtfully placed beside the bowl.

*Dear Sharon, Daniel and Sarah,*

*My heart goes out to you all as you live through the pain of loss. I have suffered loss in my life as well, but not the loss of a loved one yet, although I know that day will come. My own loss was the loss of a dream for my child—my beautiful four-year-old daughter, Madison. I'd like to tell you how your Lucas helped me cope with that loss, because I think hearing my story would help you get through this difficult time in the life of your family.*

*No child was ever wanted more than my Madison. My husband and I had tried for years to have a baby, but it just never worked for us. Finally we gave up trying so hard, and to our amazement, I got pregnant at age 37. (You hear about those things happening, but you don't realize what a miracle it is until it happens to you.) We were both so excited! My husband even built her crib himself and it was beautiful. We converted our guest room to her nursery. We bought toys and clothes and the pregnancy went very well for me. All was going according to plan.*

*When I was 18 weeks into the pregnancy my doctor recommended testing for Down Syndrome, telling me it was standard procedure for women my age. We agreed, of course, and really didn't give a single thought to the possibility of a positive diagnosis. Looking back, we probably should have, although I don't think it would have made a difference to us. No child was ever more wanted than this one I carried. When the doctor told us that our baby girl would be born with Down's, I still didn't fully understand what that would mean to my husband and me if we decided to take the pregnancy to term. The only other alternative was to terminate the pregnancy, and that never really was a possibility for either of us. We chose hope, and kept accumulating baby clothes and toys.*

*Then Gary (my husband), began researching Down Syndrome on the Internet. Personally I didn't want to know more about it than I needed to know in order to be sure Madison had the proper medical attention, but Gary wanted to know everything. The more he learned, the quieter he became around the house. He talked to me less and less about Madison's future where before we had been dreaming about which college she might attend, what kind of man she would marry and what our grandchildren would look like. As the pregnancy went on, my obstetrician began suggesting I learn as much as possible*

*about Madison's disability. I didn't want to know. I had waited so long to be a mother that I simply wanted to focus on the fun part. I figured I'd learn the bad part when it became a necessity.*

*All of this drove Gary and me apart during a time when we should have been drawing closer together. One month before my due date, Gary told me he couldn't handle having a disabled child and with tears streaming down his face he told me he was leaving. He promised to support both me and the baby financially but he simply didn't have it in him to be there emotionally for either of us. We both broke down in tears and held each other for a long time, but in the end no argument or reasoning or begging of mine could sway him from his decision to cut and run. I had never been so disappointed in anyone in my entire life. I have to admit that I was also pretty upset with God for allowing this to happen. Gary moved out the next day and within two months he filed for divorce. It was uncontested and over very quickly.*

*I went through all the bargaining with God. Why me? What did I do to deserve this? If you'll just fix it, I'll do whatever you want me to do. But God didn't see fit to do anything to change the situation. He did, however, send someone into my life the very next day who gave me a fresh perspective on my problem. That someone was Lucas.*

*I had made a quick trip to the grocery store in Port Clyde from my home in Tenants Harbor to stock up on everyday supplies. I was lost in thought that day and very burdened with a heavy spirit knowing that in two weeks or less I would be a single mom. I was not watching where I was going and pushing my grocery cart quickly around the end of an aisle, I banged it into a man who was bending over to get something off the back of a bottom shelf. I was mortified. He was surprised and then smiled at me, assuring me that he was all right, even though he was rubbing his leg where my cart had hit him.*

*He asked if my baby would be a girl or a boy. I told him Madison would be a darling little girl. Lucas commented on the excitement of the birth of his first child — Daniel and then again with the birth of Sarah. He said how he remembered looking at each one of them when they were only seconds old and wondering what life held for them. The potential each one of them were born with amazed Lucas and was something he wished for Madison. I told him that my baby Madison was going to be born with Down Syndrome so although I planned to love her dearly, her potential in life was going to be limited. I had been very upfront with people so there would be less adjustment for all of us later on. Tenants Harbor is a small town and everyone knows everything about everyone. Looking back, I think I was a bit embarrassed that my child would be considered handicapped or disabled—even in my own mind—so I felt the need to prepare everyone, especially myself.*

*Then Lucas continued and told me something I would never forget, “You don’t need to apologize for anything. It may be hard to see now but someday you will see that there are no mistakes in this world; there are only lessons. We are all less than perfect, you know. That’s why we need an ideal to pursue. Try to remember that Madison was chosen to be the perfect child for you. She has something to teach you that no other child could teach. She has something you need to make your life whole and complete. Try to focus on the idea that each one of us is delivered what seems to be imperfections into our lives to help us along the road to perfection. Madison is going to be a tremendous blessing to you, and your acceptance and love is going to be a tremendous blessing to her. It’s not the Down Syndrome that’s the problem. The problem is always in our own perception of imperfection and its purpose in our lives. Sometimes we receive so-called imperfection into our lives so we can see how imperfect we ourselves are. A problem is a higher opportunity.”*

*His keen perception stunned me. It was as if he had been reading my mind, but he knew my feelings better than I did myself! I had not even admitted to myself that I was already resenting Madison’s imperfection. I finally found my voice and thanked him.*

*“You are amazing! I cannot explain it, but I feel as if I’ve known you for years. I would appreciate it if you would remember Madison and me in your prayers...that is, if you are a praying man.”*

*“I am. And I will. I’m sorry, I should have introduced myself earlier, my name is Lucas and yours?” He gave me a smile that spilled over into his eyes and made me smile in return.*

*“It’s Nancy.*

*“If you need encouragement, you can call. Here’s my card. I would be pleased to know how you and Madison are doing as she grows into a fine young lady.”*

*I thanked him, we said goodbye, and I went through the check-out in a bit of a daze. In less than five minutes a perfect stranger had turned the direction of my life and the life of my daughter 180 degrees to the better. From that moment I began thinking of my daughter differently. She wasn’t the one with the problem. I was.*

*That was four years ago. In that time God has brought a wonderful man into my life who not only accepts Madison unconditionally but also loves her as if she were his own. He was Madison’s pediatrician. His wife had died two years before Madison was born and he took a special interest in my daughter and in me. We were married two years ago at Marshall Point Light in Port Clyde. Lucas had a business trip around that time that took him*

*through our area and we were delighted that he was able to attend the wedding. He was the one who escorted me and Madison down the center aisle between the rows of chairs on the grass. Madison was on his left and I was on his right. (Madison kept saying, "We're getting married, Mommy!") so it seemed only right that she walk down the aisle, too.)*

*Lucas' wedding gift was the most beautiful poem I have ever read. I will cherish it for the rest of my life. I've enclosed it for you to read.*

*Because of Lucas, I have been freed from my limited view of my situation. Madison is a beautiful child, she's a wonderfully giving and loving little girl who never sees imperfection in anything or anyone. Lucas was right. She has taught me so much! Every year on her birthday she sends Lucas a thank-you card that she draws and colors herself. Right now she doesn't understand why she sends it, but she will someday. We both have been praying for you since we heard about Lucas' death on the news. We will miss him. Certainly not as much as you do, but there is a hole in our circle of friends now. We would like to stay in touch with the three of you.*

*It would please Madison (and me) if you would allow her to continue to send the family of Lucas a thank-you card once a year. And we would be delighted to share a picnic lunch with you at Marshall Point Light in Port Clyde whenever you are in our area.*

*Our thoughts and prayers are with you all,*

*Nancy Stanhope*

*Jim Stanhope*

*and Madison Stanhope*

"What an amazing story!" Sharon said, with tears streaming down her face, but a smile there as well. "Here's the poem. It's called *Perfection*."

## **Perfection**

What if this world were perfect  
Just as perfect as can be

As it is right now  
With no exchange for what you see?

Would you be upset  
That God would leave us in this mess

And call what we see perfect  
All this pain and hell and stress?

Or would you see perfection  
In a lonely child's cry

Or in a breast with cancer  
Or a war that's gone awry?

The mystery of this great world  
Is full of love and pain

And unknown to us mortal souls  
Upon this earthly plain.

But what if you could see the why  
Of what you see as wrong

To understand the message  
In a sickly child's song?

The day will come when all's revealed  
To each and every one

That this strange world was perfect  
And then all will be undone.

For all the things that you will judge  
As ugly to your tastes

Will be revealed as lessons to a world  
Where there's no waste.

The sickly kid and cancered breast  
Are gifts from up above

And war is, too, a message  
In this perfect world of love.

These things are right but you won't see  
Until you drop your view

To judge the world's perfection  
Is to think as if you knew.

But you can't see a perfect world  
Because you have a need—

A need to judge the judger  
A need you must concede.

But what if you would let the grace  
Reveal within your heart

The cry of lonely children  
May just be the place to start

To start to see that this small space  
That spans through all of time

Is where you learn the lessons  
Of your life's eternal rhyme

For when you see that life's a blink  
That we spend on this earth

You'll see the word, perfection  
And that all that's bad has worth.

Yes when we pass beyond this place  
To endless space and time

You'll know that life upon this earth  
Was perfect and sublime.

For while you're here the things you see  
Are messages to you

To learn the things you need to learn  
Before your time is through

So look beyond the pain you see  
And what may be revealed

Are lessons sent for you to learn.  
(It's *you* who needs to heal.)

The sickly child that needs your love  
Was sent for you to see

Your selfish ways must be removed  
Before you can be free.

The cancered breast reveals a pain  
Resentment brought to bear.

To see this will release the cells  
That heal the shell you wear.

And what of war played out by men  
Who miss the greater point?

What does this teach to all of us?  
To whom does this anoint?

I tell you now I can't explain  
The details of it all

But I can see beyond it  
To the place before the fall.

For once you see the pattern in  
The pain you see in life,

You'll recognize perfection  
In this pain that seems so rife.

I'll leave you now with just one thought  
That just may help you see

That sickness and the wars at hand  
Are part of Heaven's key.

Now do you know the story of  
A girl named Helen Keller

Who started out as broken  
But whose life became quite stellar?

And do you think that it was wrong  
For her to start out bad

With nothing to be thankful for  
Or no way to be glad?

Well if you do, I might just ask  
What makes you think you're right?

To judge this girl's perfection  
Is to see without the light

So ponder that as you move through  
This flicker in space-time

And you may see perfection in  
This intricate design.

The more you stop and wait to see  
Beyond this one dimension

The more you'll see that what's revealed  
Is nothing but perfection.

Sharon and Sarah were holding back tears as Sharon folded the letter and poem and put them back into their envelope. Daniel was also visibly moved.

"That was a letter and poem I'd like to read again" Sarah stated. The others agreed.

“Mom? Did you know about the thank-you cards from Madison?” asked Daniel.

“Yes, I did. Your father had many interesting encounters on his trips up and down the coast to investigate insurance claims. He always shared little pieces of them with me, but he never told me the details of any of them. He certainly never told me about all the people he helped. And I never imagined he would have had this type of impact. I was shocked to see how many strangers showed up at the funeral, weren’t you?” Both kids nodded.

“Dad really was someone special, wasn’t he, Mom?” Sarah commented as she brushed away a tenacious tear threatening to run down her cheek.

“Yeah,” Daniel added softly. “I’d like to go to Port Clyde and have that picnic, Mom,” he changed the subject before emotions could have a chance to well up again. “Can we do that?”

“I don’t see why not,” Sharon responded. “I think Marshall Point Light is the lighthouse that was in the movie *Forrest Gump*. When Forrest ran to the Pacific Ocean and then turned around and ran to the Atlantic Ocean, he ran over the footbridge to that lighthouse and then turned around and kept going.”

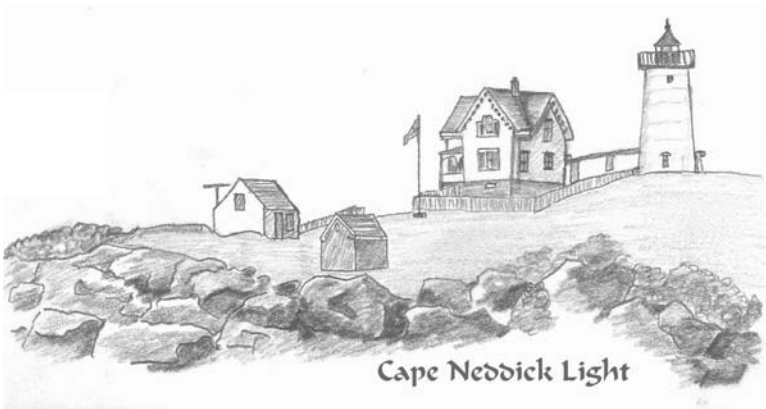
“I don’t remember that,” Daniel said. “Maybe I’ll rent that movie and watch it tonight with a bowl of popcorn. I’m starting to think that Dad was a little like Forrest Gump. He went through life helping people, completely unaware of how much of an impact he was having. Anyone want to join me for the movie tonight?”

“If you’ll do it after I get home from hockey practice, I’d like to see it, too,” Sarah said as she began clearing the table. “What’s your schedule tonight, Mom?”

“I’ll be here and when I go grocery shopping later I’ll pick up some Moxie to go with the popcorn,” Sharon agreed.

“What’s popcorn without Moxie?” both kids said in the same breath with the same look of distaste, as they wondered *who the heck drinks Moxie in this day and age*. It was a phrase Lucas had used to the point that it became a family slogan for anything that was a no-brainer. As Sharon placed Nancy Stanhope’s letter on the buffet, she reminded herself to also pick up a nice scrapbook at Michael’s. *Better get a thick one*, she thought. *I have a feeling we’re going*

*to need extra pages for photos and Madison's thank you letters over the years to come.*



Cape Neddick Light

# FOUR

*Stillness is the most powerful drug in the universe...*

The second breakfast the DeVitus family shared was a soufflé-type concoction called apple pancake. Made in an iron skillet with sliced apples sprinkled with cinnamon sautéed in butter, it was one of the family's favorites that they shared only on special occasions. They didn't know it when they chose the menu, but today's letter-reading would make this day a very special one—a day that would reveal something else about their father they had never known before.

It was Daniel's turn to read and he reached into the punch bowl and extracted a gray envelope. He used the letter opener, cleared his throat and began to read aloud.

*To The Family of Lucas DeVitus,*

*First let me say how sorry I was to learn of Lucas' tragic death. It is hard enough to understand when a person dies after a long and productive life, but when someone dies so young, it is very difficult to see what purpose there is in taking him so early.*

*I want to try to convey to you how much Lucas helped me several years ago when we met by chance at the park across from Cape Neddick Light in York Beach. I say we met by chance but, looking back, it was no accident that our paths crossed that day.*

*I am the oldest of three children born to my parents 38 years ago. When I was twelve years old my father told my mother that he had met someone else and was leaving her, me, and my two sisters, and was moving in with the other woman. He said there was no hope for the marriage and that he had been unhappy for many years. He said a lot of hurtful things to my mother*

*that day and we three children heard it all from behind our closed bedroom doors where we had sought refuge when the fighting started. Not until we heard the outside door slam behind him and our mother sobbing uncontrollably did we open the door and run to try to comfort her. We were the ones needing comforting ourselves, and in the midst of her shock and grief, she put her arms around us as we all cried together.*

*It took us a solid year of pulling together to get straightened out and partially recover from the shock. (I don't think it's possible to ever fully recover from a shock like that at such a young age. Even now it upsets me to think of that terrible day.) Our mother did a noble job of providing for us and keeping us focused on the positive things in our lives. She filed for divorce and the judge granted her sole custody of us. He also awarded her child support from my father. The problem came in making him pay it.*

*Life was hard for us, but we stayed together and pulled together and we made it—in spite of our father's abandonment. My two sisters handled it better than I did. I was twelve years old and had thought my dad and I were close. He was my idol. He was everything to me. I trusted him and I loved him. I never did understand how he could just slam that door behind him and walk away from me. I took it all so personally that it colored my thinking about life, about the meaning of love, and about my own ability to be a husband and father someday. In a word, I was devastated.*

*It took me over a dozen years to even think about the possibility of falling in love and marrying someday, but eventually I did when I was 26. My wife has been a tremendous help to me in overcoming my emotionally handicapped legacy from my father's betrayal, and I'm grateful to her. We have three wonderful children and I loved them even before they were born, but always in the back of my mind was the hovering doubt that I would someday inadvertently break their hearts as my father had broken mine by failing them somehow.*

*To top all of that I was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor approximately five years ago, which chemo seemed to only put on hold temporarily. Shortly after my second round of chemo, just about four years ago, I decided to take a trip to Maine to visit a favorite spot to contemplate what seemed like a very bleak future. After crossing the bridge from New Hampshire, I made my way to York Beach and parked across from Cape Neddick Light which sat there, solitary and lonely, on its rocky island called the Nubble. I could identify with the solitary and lonely feelings. Lost in thought I didn't notice the man walking toward me until he stopped beside me and spoke.*

*"Great to see the sun, isn't it?" he commented.*

*Startled I turned and replied, "You're right about that."*

*We chatted for a few minutes and eventually he opened a vintage thermos he was carrying that had to be older than I was and began pouring coffee into the cover and handed it to me. I thanked him as he poured one for himself into the cup that fit under the cover.*

*"That's an old thermos," I commented. "Had it a long time?"*

*"Yeab. It belonged to my father. It's the only thing of his that I have left, so I carry it in my car on business trips. Still works great, too!" He offered a wry smile.*

*I surprised myself by saying, 'I don't have anything left from my father, and I really never wanted anything of his.' I had no idea why I said that or what depths of my soul it had revealed to someone as perceptive as Lucas was that day. Embarrassed, I turned away from him and once again fixed my eyes on the lighthouse. Half of me hoped he would just take my empty cup and go away. Half of me hoped he would continue to talk.*

*He poured me a refill and asked me why I felt that way about my father. I told him what had happened to our family. He didn't interrupt except to ask questions that prompted me to reveal more of my feelings. To my surprise I blurted out, "Why? How could he just leave me so easily? Didn't he know that I worshipped him?" I was embarrassed. I felt like a little child unable to control my emotions. I apologized and began to explain my current situation with my brain tumor and how confused I was as to what was happening to me.*

*Lucas just stood and listened and in the most compassionate and caring act I have ever experienced he simply reminded me that even though I felt betrayed by my dad and adrift with no one to go to with my problems, I still had an anchor in a heavenly father. He reminded me that God had not let go of me as my earthly father had. God was still holding onto me, so since I was not really adrift (just feeling adrift), I should stop allowing those feelings to rule me. He said that feelings are not always based on truth or facts. In my family situation, the fault lay with my father, not with me. He urged me to get over the false guilt I had been assuming and move on. I listened to him because he made perfect sense. He then said something that I am convinced saved my life. He said, "Richard, as soon as you let go of this misplaced guilt and resentment towards your father, you will give that cancer over to a higher power and you will be healed. This is not a mystery, he said. The resentments that you hold onto cause stress which releases hormones into your bloodstream that inevitably weaken your immune system and make it impossible for your body to deal with the cancerous cells. Believe it or not, everyone has the potential for cancer. You just haven't let go of your resentment and anger long enough to allow your body*

*to heal itself. Have you ever heard the saying “Let go and let God”? Again, it’s really not a mystery and you don’t even have to believe in God for it to work. God believes in you and is always there waiting for you to let go and turn your problems over to him. And if you don’t believe in God believe in the healing power of your body, which is on display every time a cut heals or a broken bone mends itself. Your body has a mysterious power within it. It runs and heals itself with no conscious help from you. Let go to that power. Let go of the tension caused by resentment. This tension releases chemicals into your bloodstream that block your body’s healing power. Stop blocking the healing power within you. This is faith, and all it takes is simply letting go.”*

*Over the next hour or so he shared his soul with me and gave me the courage to finally bare my own soul to another man—something that I had vowed I would never do because I was afraid of giving another man the opportunity to hurt me as my father had done. But that was all over now. Before he left he told me he would send me something that would help me let go. It was a poem, and I’ve enclosed it with this letter. We then exchanged business cards and parted friends.*

*Over the next few years I called him occasionally as I encountered various challenges with my cancer treatments, with raising my children, or when my own self-doubts resurfaced. He always listened to me, always encouraged me to go deep within myself and draw on the strength that lay there, waiting to be tapped. He repeatedly bolstered my courage and told me many times that he believed I was a great dad and that, if I would just be patient and listen to that inner voice, I’d make the right choices. He was a few years older than I, so I listened to him.*

*Looking back on it, he was right. And so generous to me as I learned to trust my intuition and that inner power he kept talking about. And, yes, I did let go and the cancer eventually disappeared. I can’t begin to tell you how amazing that day was when the doctors told me the cancer was gone.*

*I am deeply saddened by the loss of this man who saved my life and helped me become the husband and father I am today. If I am any good at either of those two jobs, it’s probably due to Lucas DeVitus. My older brother, so to speak. My example. My mentor. My friend. I shall miss him for the rest of my life.*

*If I can do anything to help you in any way at any time, please do not hesitate to call me. I will try my best to live up to the wonderful example that Lucas was to me.*

*God bless you all and give us all the strength to adjust to being without him,*

*Richard Lewis*

Then Daniel, once again amazed by what he was learning about his father, turned to the enclosed poem and said, “The name of the poem is *Cancer*,” as he began to read.

## Cancer

The devil sits inside your head  
Confusing you with words.  
The simple phrases left unsaid  
Distort like scattered birds.

In every moment that goes by  
You hear things in your mind  
But never say those little things.  
You say things in their kind.

Resentments build on hidden words  
All hoarded up inside  
To steal the soul and plant disease  
From which you cannot hide.

The cancer that you see each day  
In angels on this earth  
Grew from the hell inside their minds  
So haunted from their birth.

Angry words inside our heads  
All covered up with smiles  
Become resentments left unsaid.  
Our bodies show the miles.

And then one day a sweet one dies  
And none of us can see

Why God would take the angel now  
While letting hell run free.

But hell is born inside the heads  
Of angels who don't know  
That holding on to angry words  
Just makes hell's cancer grow.

So stop the pain that's killing you  
By letting go of hate  
And lose the veiled resentments  
That will surely seal your fate,

And feel the healing presence  
Of the silence in your soul.  
And the cancer that would get you  
Will be stopped, and you'll be whole.

Silence ruled at the DeVitus dining table for a few minutes as they tried to take in what Daniel had read.

"Mom...?" Sarah began. Then she began again, "Mom, why did Dad know so much about what Richard Lewis went through as a child? He seemed to really understand where Richard was coming from." Daniel looked up from Richard's letter that he still held in his hand.

"It almost sounded like Dad had been there. How would he know what to say to this man that would unlock his feelings and allow him to heal? Unless..."

"Unless he had been through it himself?" Sharon finished the sentence for her son. "The truth is bad things *do* happen to good people. Your dad didn't always have it easy," Sharon explained to Sarah and Daniel.

"What happened, Mom?" This from Sarah.

"I'll tell you about it because you deserve to know what your father struggled with for much of his life."

Daniel poured more orange juice for everyone as Sharon told her children what qualified Lucas to help Richard Lewis accept his father's abandonment and move on.

"Four days after your father was born, his own father simply got up from the kitchen table, turned and walked out the door without one word to his wife or even a casual look at his son. As a child your father had been colicky and off to a rough start in life despite his mother's best efforts. He had also just filled his diaper and it was all his father needed for an excuse to abandon his responsibilities. Neither of them had ever heard from him again.

"They never were able to track him down, although your grandmother tried for years to locate him through the police and the courts. After a year of terrible struggling to earn enough to keep them together, she finally gave up searching for the man who fathered her son, deciding that she didn't want him back and they were both better off without his presence in their lives. She had never taken his last name when they were married, so she simply remained Anne DeVitus—the name she had been born with and the surname she gave to your father.

"As Lucas grew, he had questions, of course. Your grandmother answered them all truthfully. When she didn't know the answer, she didn't make something up. She simply told him what she knew."

"That must have been so hard for Gram Anne!" Sarah exploded with the intense feelings washing over her as she tried to imagine how hard life had been for her grandmother and the little boy who had eventually become such a great dad to her and Daniel.

"What a jerk!" Daniel said, as he shook his head and tried to take it all in. "Why would he leave them alone like that? And how did dad become such a great dad with no father to teach him?"

Sharon smiled at her two children, grateful for their maturity and the level of compassion they were capable of feeling.

"Your dad was a very special man, but he did have a few faults, too, just as we all do. That's what makes us human," she explained. "For many years he carried a deep resentment toward his father. In a way, the anger toughened him up so he could survive his childhood. Years later he had to face that anger and

resentment and deal with it so it didn't produce bitterness. He explained it to me once by saying that once bitterness takes root, it keeps people from becoming who they're intended to be, and sometimes it keeps them from becoming who they were meant to be. I didn't understand that at the time, but I'm beginning to now."

"I remember another fault Dad had," Daniel grinned. "Sometimes he could be a perfect klutz, like the day he tried to teach me how to grill a steak!"

"I remember that," Sarah laughed and Sharon just rolled her eyes, recalling that fiasco, too. "He said men were the best grillers. Much better than women, who should stick to the kitchen stove for cooking."

"And then as he stuck his fork into the steak to turn it, he leaned one arm on the deck railing and it broke and he landed in the swimming pool totally under water except for the fork and steak, which he did everything in his power to keep from getting wet!" Daniel was laughing now, too, as he remembered the surprised look on his father's face.

Sharon was wiping tears of laughter from her eyes. This story had always cracked them all up, even Lucas, who had not been above laughing at his own expense.

"I remember reaching down to help him out of the pool and he grabbed my hand and pulled me in with him!" Daniel shook his head as the memories flooded over him.

"Then Mom and I looked at each other, nodded, held hands and jumped into the pool with you!" Sarah exploded with laughter.

The three of them sat there laughing at the memory until they realized that Lucas wasn't there to laugh with them. Gradually they regained their composure, but Daniel looked across the table at his mother and raised his eyebrows with an unspoken question.

"Yes, you two. It's okay to laugh. We will always miss him, but it's times like these that his presence is still here with us. If I know your father, he's probably splitting his sides laughing with us right now." Sharon's observation started them laughing again.

"Dad had a great smile, didn't he?" Sarah reflected quietly.

"Yes, he did," Sharon responded and reached across the table to take Sarah's hand and then Daniel's as well. "And you can

just bet he'd be smiling at both of you right now if you could see him."

"I don't have to see him to feel him in my heart," Sarah said with brimming eyes. "I'll never forget when I was little and used to be afraid to go to sleep without you or Dad in the room, he would always point to the middle of my chest and say, 'You don't need to be afraid, Sarah. Daddy is always with you, in your heart'"

"Okay, okay," Daniel interrupted quickly, trying to prevent a female melt-down. "In the true spirit of dad, let's throw these dishes into the pool and jump in and wash them!"

The two women giggled and the emotional moment passed. Sharon squeezed Daniel's hand and lay down the law as she looked him in the eye. "For that terrible suggestion, you get to wash the dishes, young man!" Daniel groaned as he rose and began to clear the table. They smiled as they heard him mutter as he made the first trip to the kitchen, "Where are you, Dad, when I really need you?"



# FIVE

*We all fall...*

Right on schedule on day three, the DeVitus family met in the kitchen and agreed on blueberry pancakes with maple syrup and bacon for breakfast.

“I’ll do the bacon so it’s crisp enough,” Sarah volunteered.

“I’ll do my famous twice-flipped blueberry pancakes,” Daniel boasted, taking the griddle out of Sharon’s hand.

“Okay, I get the point,” Sharon laughed. “You two don’t think I can cook.”

“Don’t be ridiculous Mom, you’re the best cook around,” said Sarah. “We just want to help”

Sharon moved into the dining room to set the table with the crystal, silver and china. Today was the day for the reading of the third letter.

When the meal was finished and the daily banter had ended, Daniel moved the punch bowl containing the letters to the center of the table.

“Sarah, it’s your turn to pick and read today,” he said. Both women nodded their agreement. Sarah took another sip of juice and reached into the bottom of the bowl to pull out a cream-colored letter sized envelope with graceful and elegant handwriting that read *To The Family of Lucas DeVitus*. Gearing up her courage for the unknown revelations ahead, Sarah slit open the envelope with the letter opener and began to read.

*Dear Family of Lucas DeVitus,*

*Today you have laid your husband and father to rest. This has been extremely hard for all of you. I know this because loss of loved ones comes to each of us eventually in this life, and I, too, have said that last goodbye to those I have loved. First, my father, then to two children who each died before they were born, then my mother, and finally to my husband of forty-seven years just last June. So I do understand the pain of loss and I offer whatever comfort I can give you through what I am about to tell you about my friend, Lucas.*

*My husband, John, and I were very much in love and very happy together. I cannot remember even one major disagreement between us (although I'm sure we had them)! After John died of a massive coronary, I continued running our bed and breakfast on Aisle au Haut. It was home. It was the place we loved the most in the world, and it was where I wanted to be—in the middle of all the memories we had shared there together. But I did have my moments of wondering if I was just a little crazy, living there alone year-round. The Keeper's House is what we called it and Robinson Point Lighthouse Station really is a jewel of a lighthouse.*

*One day several years ago, Lucas arrived by mail boat from the mainland. I believe he had been in Stonington that day on some insurance claim business. He told my new husband, Earle, and me that it was his life-long fascination with lighthouses that lured him to Aisle au Haut and our doorstep. Life at The Keeper's House is pure quintessential Maine Coast living. People love it, and so do I. Lucas was as excited as a little boy to think he was going to spend the night at a real lighthouse!*

*Because it was early in the tourist season, that night Lucas was our only guest. I put him in The Garrett room with windows overlooking the tower about 100 feet away. The next morning at breakfast, he made me laugh at his description of how he had to climb into bed sideways to avoid one low point in the ceiling. He did like a good laugh, didn't he?*

*As we lingered over second and third cups of coffee, Earle left to attend to the gardening and other chores and, since the mail boat wasn't scheduled to leave for a couple of hours, Lucas and I had some unburied conversation. As perceptive as he was, though, it didn't take him long to look me in the eye and ask, "For all your happiness with Earle, I sense an underlying sadness in you, Helen. Something you've been carrying for many years. If it would help to talk about it, I'd be a good listener."*

*His directness surprised me and my immediate reaction was to change the subject, but one look into those deep blue eyes of his put me at ease and I*

*surprised myself by telling him the story of my relationship with my mother who had died two years before.*

*I was my mother's only child and she loved me, but she had a limited mental capacity, and sometimes it caused a problem. As a child she had been repeatedly molested by her half-brothers, to the point that she thought this was normal behavior in families. Neither the boys nor my mother ever told my grandmother what had happened. By the time my mother married my father she had buried those bad memories so deep in her soul that they would never consciously surface.*

*The trouble for me began with my pediatrician. He skillfully placed his body between my mother who was sitting across the examining room and me as I lay on the examining table. She could not see what he was doing with his hands. I did not know that what he was doing was not part of a regular physical examination. I remember struggling and whimpering a little bit once, but he shushed me comfortingly and chuckled to cover it up. It happened every time I had a physical checkup. I never told my mother. I never told anyone. When I was old enough to see a regular doctor, I pushed the bad memories out of my mind, but they still haunted me.*

*It drove an invisible wedge between my mother and me that lasted beyond her death. It wasn't until I was forty years old and married that I was watching a movie on television about molestation that I realized with a sickening jolt exactly what had happened to me. I also realized that the wedge between my mother and me was because unconsciously I had always blamed her for not protecting me from that pediatrician. Over the years I'm sure I magnified it and eventually it destroyed my trust in her ability to be a good mother and kept us both from enjoying a normal mother-daughter relationship.*

*I had told Earle all this before we married, and he had been so understanding of both my feelings and of my mother's total ignorance of any wrong that was done to me. My husband reminded me that she had not been able to see the doctor's hands from where she had sat during the physical exam. He had made sure of that. I thought it must be okay for him to do that even though something in me screamed that it wasn't okay at all.*

*The problem, of course, became my unforgiving attitude toward my mother. For years before she died she had suffered from several debilitating illnesses—diabetes, hypertension and early onset dementia. These circumstances made it both impractical and impossible for me to talk with her about why I was so deeply angry with her. I'm sure she had known there was something wrong between us, but was at a loss to know what it was or what to do about it. So she coped as she had always coped; she ignored the situation, burying it deep within her mind and acted as if everything were fine between us. I*

*perpetuated the problem by doing the same thing, not wanting to upset the delicate falsely peaceful coexistence between us.*

*The deep sadness within me was because I had neither forgiven nor reconciled with my mother before she died. It haunted me until the day your Lucas sat down at my kitchen table on Aisle au Haut and looking me in the eye, saw my agony and encouraged me to tell him what was causing it. Somehow he knew I needed to get it out, deal with it, and move on in order to be truly at peace.*

*With Lucas' help that day I resolved my anger toward my mother and truly forgave her for her unwitting betrayal of my childhood trust in her protection. It was a tremendously freeing moment for me and I cried buckets of tears into Lucas' handkerchief and then into the dishtowel he handed me from the kitchen countertop.*

*That was how Earle found us when he came back from the garden for a coffee break. Lucas filled him in while I nodded in agreement, because I could not yet speak. My husband then took me in his arms and held me as I regained my composure. Lucas discreetly rose from the table, picked up his overnight case, thanked us for a good night's sleep and softly said he'd like to walk to the dock to wait for the mail boat which was due in 15 minutes to take him back to Blue Hill and civilization. Earle thanked him sincerely and removed his right arm from my shoulder and extended his right hand which was met and firmly grasped by Lucas in a moment of male understanding that only two husbands could have fully understood.*

*After Lucas had shut the kitchen door softly behind him and I had regained my wobbly equilibrium, Earle and I walked to the dock to thank Lucas for being the means God had used to help me finally forgive my mother for something that was not her fault in the first place and would have horrified her if she had known what had happened to me. But Lucas was already gone, the mail boat already a quarter of the way back to Blue Hill.*

*A few days later I received a beautiful poem in the mail from him (which I've enclosed) that brought me to my knees. I swear I cried for three days straight as I forgave my mother whom, Lucas reminded me, was also once a scared little girl herself.*

*We never saw Lucas again, but I did write him a long letter to express my thanks and he called us every year at Christmas without fail. He was a remarkable man, and it was his compassion and kindness that began my healing process that was long overdue. Because of Lucas DeVitus I am a happy and contented woman, at peace within myself, at peace with those around me, and at peace with my mother at long last.*

*I learned several other lessons from Lucas over the years. I learned to let go of the past, no matter what it had held. I learned to start living in the here and now and appreciating what I had right in front of me instead of mourning what I had lost or never had. I learned to stop trying to project what the future would hold and also to stop fretting about the moment but to live it to the fullest, whatever it held. All these things I learned from your husband, Sharon, and your father, Sarah and Daniel. (Yes, he told me about you all. You were truly and well loved, all three of you.)*

*So I wanted you to know how very much I will miss him. I like to imagine he is somewhere with my mother right now, assuring her that everything is finally as it should be in her daughter's life and letting her know that her daughter loves her and appreciates her, even though she never really told her so. Someday, I will do that myself, face to face and heart to heart.*

*Peace to you all, as well,*

*Helen Armstrong*

*P.S. Come and visit me on Aisle au Haut!*

“Here’s the poem,” Sarah said, as she read on.

### **Before You Knew Her**

Your mother was a little girl  
Once innocent and pure  
Who made her way through life each day  
And much she did endure.

You may ask how a man like me  
Could know your mother's path,  
And all I'll say is that I know  
We all endure life's wrath.

Each one of us is brought to bear  
The crosses of this world,

To go through life enduring things  
As life becomes unfurled.

Though some of us will reach our peak  
And learn from things we've done  
The greater share will go through life  
Naïve to what they've spun.

So when you see the foolish things  
Your mother will display  
Remember that the little girl  
Was innocent one day.

She doesn't know the pain she wreaks  
Upon this world she's made,  
Her selfish thoughts and wicked ways  
Flow from a dark cascade.

The years of life that you can't see  
That only she has seen  
Have brought you to this place you share  
That you view through her screen.

This mask she wears that hides the good  
Destroyed through years of hell  
Is not her face, but hell's disguise,  
Through which it casts its spell.

So try your best to not be judge  
Of what she says and was,  
Forgive her now because, for sure,  
She knows not what she does.

There was a stunned silence around the dining room table as Sarah put the letter down. Sharon spoke first to her daughter.

“That was a very hard letter for you to have to read, Sarah, and I want you to know that I am very proud of your maturity in being able to get through it. Maybe it would be best if I read the letters first to make sure their okay for you two to hear.”

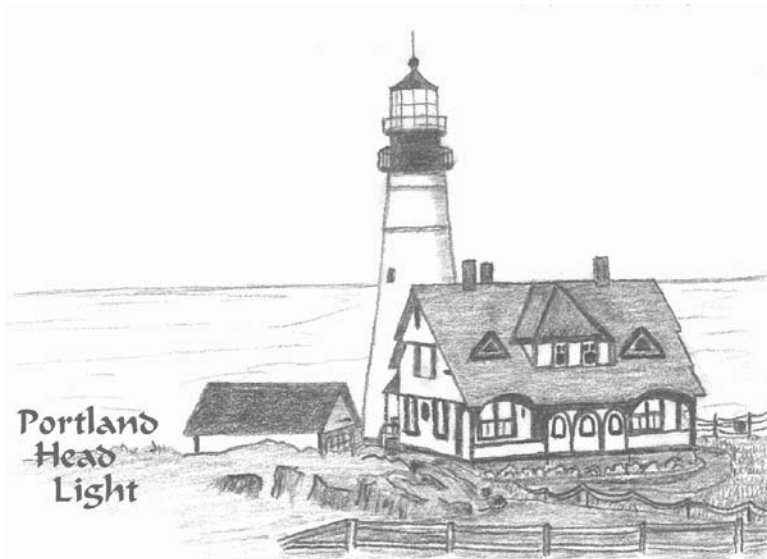
“No Mom, I know it was an adult kind of thing, but I got through it okay. I just felt bad for that woman as a scared little girl.”

“I agree with Sarah. I think we should go ahead as we planned: to read them together as a family,” Daniel added.

“OK,” Sharon agreed, taken aback by the maturity in their rebuttals and the insistent tone in their voices. “I understand.”

“Your father was a remarkable man and you should know all you can about him now. It’s so amazing to me that he could put total strangers at ease and get them to open up. It must have been very hard for that woman to open up to a total stranger about what happened to her after keeping it bottled up inside for so many years, but your father had a way about him that made people trust him and open up to him. I’m not sure he always understood what happened in those instances, but it seems that he really did help a lot of people we never knew about,” Sharon said pensively, wondering what else there was that she didn’t know about her husband.

She rose from the table and the children rose with her to help clear the dishes and prepare for whatever the day would bring. Soon their good-natured banter was bouncing back and forth between them as the three of them made plans for the day. Part of the talk included the possibility of a trip to The Keeper’s House on Aisle au Haut this summer. They were sure Helen Armstrong would make them all feel right at home.



Portland  
Head  
Light

# SIX

## *To see or not to see...*

Day four. Breakfast had been croissants with sausage patties and eggs Benedict. Now it was Sharon's turn to choose and read a letter from the punch bowl. Just as she reached into the bowl, Sarah shared an idea.

"Before you choose a letter, Mom, I think we should decide what to do with the letters we've already opened and read. We can't just leave them on the buffet table in a pile." Sharon stopped with her hand mid-way to the punch bowl.

"You're right. I've been thinking about that, too, but I haven't come up with a solution yet. Daniel, do you have any ideas?"

"Okay. This is now a family council meeting, and as the head of the minority party, I'm calling it to order. Discussion is open. I have an idea, but before I share it, does anyone else have a suggestion?" Sarah spoke first.

"Actually, I do. What about a scrapbook? A really nice one that will remain in our family forever?"

Daniel agreed and added, "I was thinking of something like that, too. I was also thinking that we could do something special with the poems. It's so weird but it seems like the poems were like Dad's calling card."

"Yeah, it's kind of cool," Sarah said.

"Great ideas," Sharon said with a pleased smile. "I think there will be times when we go back to these letters and poems to read them again to remember your father and the difference he made in people's lives. This is a way we can honor him." She couldn't help herself; the tears began to flow. Sarah handed her a tissue and Daniel reached over and patted her arm awkwardly.

"It's okay, Mom," he said consolingly.

Sarah sniffed audibly but managed to keep the tears in check. Daniel shared his thoughts.

“I think a scrapbook is a good idea. Do we all agree?” Sharon and Sarah nodded affirmatively.

Sharon recovered her composure and said, “Well done, family!”

Sharon took a moment to look at her two children. How proud she was of them. How pleased Lucas would have been at how mature they were acting and how they were managing their grief. In her heart she sent a thought to Lucas: *Do you see these children of yours, Lucas? Do you see how fine a job you did as a father? Thank you for that. I just wish I had told you that more often while you were still here. I know our relationship wasn't perfect, but I've always loved you and our love and concern for the wellbeing of Daniel and Sarah kept us on track.* Then she reached into the punch bowl and withdrew a nine-by-twelve manila envelope with a single typed line that read *The DeVitus Family.*

She opened the envelope and unfolded the crisp single sheet of white linen paper crammed full of single-spaced typing. “Better pour me some more coffee, Sarah,” she said as she held her cup out. “This is longer than I thought it was going to be.” She glanced at the signature at the bottom of the page. “This is from Donald Paulson, the biology professor.”

“The one who kept taking his glasses off and putting them back on?” asked Sarah.

“The one and the same,” Sharon affirmed with a small smile, remembering how nervous the man had been. Nervous, but sincere and likeable. She began to read aloud as her children listened intently.

*Dear DeVitus Family,*

*I wanted to share with you my memories of Lucas because he was a tremendous influence in my life at a point where I could easily have made a choice that would not have been beneficial for me. I don't know if he ever talked about the day we met at Portland Head Light 12 years ago, but it is a day that I will never forget.*

*Up until that point in my life I had been pretty much self-sufficient and quite capable of making my own decisions and choosing my own path through life. I had always been told I was intelligent and I believed what I*

heard (whether it was true or not). This was the basis of my belief that I didn't need anyone's help—with anything. I considered myself well able to do whatever I put my hand to and I felt totally in control of my own destiny.

*I was wrong.*

*A dozen years ago I suffered through the death of both my parents in a car crash caused by a drunk driver. This obviously devastated me since I was an only child and their passing left me totally alone in the world. I had never married and had only one or two friends I considered close, but not close enough to share my private feelings, because that would have meant I would have to allow myself to become vulnerable to the human frailty of needing people in my life.*

*In my sorrow and suffering from a profound sense of loss on the day of their shared funerals, I found myself driving aimlessly toward the ocean. As I drove I wondered what possible purpose could have been served by the senseless death of these two wonderful people. That made me wonder why I had been born into this world and what my purpose in life could possibly be. For the first time in my life I felt as if I had no reason to live, no goal I was meant to accomplish, no calling that would both fulfill me and help me make a difference in the world. I wondered if anyone would even miss me after I died.*

*In this negative frame of mind I parked my car in the parking lot of Portland Head Light and started down the paved walkway hugging the cliff's edge. I wasn't thinking of anything in particular, just allowing the sense of loss to overwhelm me. I remember it was a very foggy day and the blast of the foghorn continually startled me from my reverie of depressing thoughts. At one point I was so introspective in my own internal fog that I nearly bumped into a man coming down the path toward me, not seeing him until he was right in front of me. It was Lucas and he spoke first.*

*"Hello! Soupy today, isn't it?"*

*"Yes," I answered abruptly, not wanting to converse with anyone. But he wouldn't let me off the hook that easily and the path at that point made it difficult to pass someone without acknowledgment. He had come to a stop and was looking directly at me.*

*"I was wondering," he continued, "if you've ever really looked at these rocks. I mean really looked at them from a scientific standpoint." He could not have known of my life-long interest in science, but he had inadvertently chosen an area that had always fascinated me: geology. I was so startled that I answered him.*

*“Actually I have,” I said as I stopped and found myself looking into those penetrating eyes of his. I sensed that this was an intelligent and caring person and something made me speak freely to him as I did not normally speak to anyone. There was something about Lucas that made me trust him.*

Sharon glanced up at her children and commented, “He was like that. I remember feeling the same thing when I met him for the first time.” She continued reading.

*By this time I had chosen the field of geology for my life’s work and had earned my undergraduate degree at Montana State University at Bozeman. I had been a professor at that same university for three years when I received the phone call regarding my parents’ death.*

*Lucas pointed to the rocks just below us. “Look at those slanted vertical lines that make the rocks look like a loaf of sliced bread. See how they are not random, but straight lines as if someone took a huge knife and the slices fell at an angle as they separated from the loaf? I’ve always wondered if those straight lines are because of the cellular structure of the rocks. Do you know?”*

*I was speechless for a moment or two, because I had never noticed those straight lines in the rocks before and wondered how I, a scientist and professor of geology, could have missed them. I took a second look at Lucas and admitted that I had never given the subject a thought, but I certainly would do some investigating and get back to him if he would like. He pulled his business card from his shirt pocket and handed it to me. I gave him one of mine as well. I started to move away from him but he stopped me with another radical idea.*

*“It seems to me,” Lucas said, in what I had later come to find was his non-threatening way of getting to the major point he wanted to drive home, “that those straight lines are like the glowing embers in burning wood. Have you noticed that those embers are square? Did you ever wonder if that was because they were burning on the cellular structural lines? So I’m wondering if these rocks could have been trees once. Maybe giant sequoias. Maybe before Noah’s big flood in the Bible. Maybe they are really petrified trees. What do you think?”*

*I was dumbfounded. Twice in two minutes Lucas had hit me with simple observations that forced me to notice the obvious that I had missed in all my years of education and teaching. Was it possible he could be right? My scientific training forced me to admit that I needed to do some research before I could respond to his question, and once again I promised to exercise due*

*diligence and get back to him. I set a deadline for that response a month from that date and we shook hands and started in different directions.*

*But after a few steps, Lucas turned back and said, “One more thing, Donald. If you really want to go deeply into these mysteries, when you get back to your lab take a deep look into your microscope and, once you get down to the smallest spinning elements that can be seen, ponder this question. What keeps it all spinning? Because, in the end, no matter how deep you go, everything you look at in this world is made of the same atomic structures, and those atoms are spinning now—have been spinning since the beginning of time—and will continue to spin at the same rate forever. And unless there is such a thing as perpetual motion—and any scientist worth his salt will tell you that there is no such thing as perpetual motion—then you have to ask yourself, What keeps it all spinning? From my perspective, it is an all-powerful, all-encompassing intelligence, present in all things. No matter what you look at, a flower, a table, a rock, or a human being, they are all made of the same spinning stuff. And just like you can’t see the electricity that spins a motor, but you know it’s there and you know it has a source, you will never be able to see with your eyes the force that spins an atom but it’s obvious that it is there and it’s obvious that it has a source.” With that Lucas smiled intently, then turned and walked away.*

*I, too, turned and continued to walk, stunned by this last observation and the eloquence with which he was able to express it. Now I was no longer oblivious to the elements of nature around me. Everything I saw now challenged me to investigate further. It also made me realize I needed to investigate one of the oldest books existent in the world: the book of Genesis, first in the Bible.*

*Since I had been taken to church as a child, I always wanted to believe that God existed, but once I became a scientist, believing in God seemed at odds with my profession. Because of this I had never really studied the Bible—certainly not from a scientific investigative standpoint. I wasn’t very enthusiastic about that undertaking, but after listening to Lucas I felt compelled to dig deeper.*

*After my parents’ funeral I returned home and began the investigation that would ultimately turn my life around. I thought I had everything going for me, but in the process of attempting to answer Lucas’ seemingly innocent question about cellular structure, I discovered I didn’t have the most important area of my life figured out at all. All my education and experience didn’t prepare me for eternity and really hadn’t equipped me for my journey through this life on Earth if I couldn’t answer a simple question posed to me by a seemingly simple man on a simple walk on the coast of Maine.*

*I spent several months doing my own primary scientific research. I learned enough Aramaic to go back into the original wording of the first three chapters of the book of Genesis and discover for myself what the original words meant. I was amazed at what I learned. So amazed that I began to want to learn more about the cellular structure of the human body. So I began taking courses for a second doctorate in cell biology and neuroscience, which I earned two years later. Now I am a professor of biology at the University of Southern Maine. I also host a weekly radio talk show on the correlation of spiritual issues and scientific knowledge and how true science always validates what the Bible has always claimed: I now believe there is no conflict between true science and the Bible. God did it all, and he did it well. He had a purpose in every little detail of life and for those who believe in him, it is a very personal purpose. Through my searching I discovered that I, too, have a purpose in this life. I believe it is to teach and encourage others to seek the answers to life's questions through intelligent investigation and to trust in a force greater than themselves for the answers.*

*The bottom line? Lucas and I became close friends. During this period of my life I corresponded with him frequently. Sometimes he called me just to encourage me in my pursuit of knowledge. Sometimes I called him to share something exciting I had learned in my coursework. He had a natural curiosity that convinced me he could have been a great professor himself if he had had the same opportunities I was given as a boy. But he became a very great man in spite of his meager beginnings.*

*I will always remember Lucas DeVitus as a friend, a spiritual mentor, an intelligent and caring individual. He was my friend, and I shall miss him on this earth. My greatest solace is that I know I will see him again, in heaven.*

*I wanted you to know that. I also want you to know that my prayers are with you during this difficult time in your lives. If I can be of any help to you please do call me. I truly mean that.*

*Sincerely,*

*Donald Paulson*

*P.S. I've included a poem that Lucas wrote and sent me that really drove home the message I received from him that first day we met.*

Sharon unfolded the poem and continued to read.

## Quantum Mystery

If you look beyond the face  
Of everything you see

You'll come upon the principles  
Of life's great mystery.

You'll see the surface fade to shapes  
And deeper as you go

You'll see a world of inner space  
A world you didn't know—

A world of things all moving fast  
And spinning to a beat,

A world of space illumined by  
That which is not concrete.

And deeper still as you go on  
To see what makes this world

You come upon an energy  
Where elements are swirled.

And if you look beyond the pool  
Of swirling energy

You cannot see what makes it move  
It's stillness that you see.

How can it be that all this stuff  
Flows from a place so still

Creating all the things we see?  
There must be some great will.

Is this the place where God resides  
Creating all we know?

And if I wait in silence there  
Will he help me to grow?

The pattern of the things we see  
Comes from this place unseen

So it must be that I flow from  
This space that's in between.

In simple words I've heard revealed  
An ancient mystery

Describing this still place I've found  
A place that holds the key

It tells us how to seek the truth  
And though it may seem odd

It's written in the greatest book:  
"Be still and know that I am God."

There was silence around the dining room table as Sharon slowly put the letter down. Finally Sarah spoke the thoughts no one else had voiced.

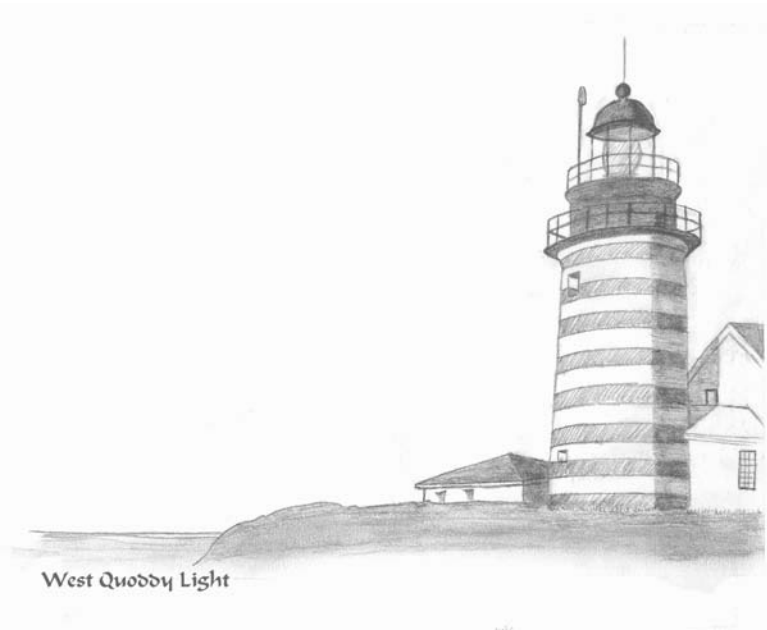
“I didn’t know all that about Dad,” she said softly. “I knew he liked to tell us about God, but I never knew he talked to strangers about this stuff.”

Daniel found his voice and offered, “I’m blown away by that letter! And that poem! Maybe Dad should have been a priest. And how is it that we didn’t know he wrote poetry?”

With a tear in her eye, as she looked out the window, Sharon remembered out loud, “There was a short period in your father’s life, when you two were just little children, when your father wrote several poems and short books on the topic of God and spirituality. It happened during a time while he was fasting and meditating. I remember feeling really strange about it and wondering what it was all about. He would sometimes just do these things without warning but this time was different. It lasted much longer than previous times when he would fast for health reasons, and out of it came many poems which he said were written *through* him, not *by* him. The whole thing made me a little uneasy so I never asked him about it. And he never really shared his writings with me, though I never really asked him to either. It wasn’t that I wasn’t interested, I just...” Sharon paused, looking down, as a wave of emotion began to build in her chest. Not knowing how to respond, Daniel got to his feet.

“Maybe it will make more sense as we read more of the letters,” he offered. Sarah nodded as she stood up as well.

After an awkward moment of silence, while the children stared compassionately at their mother as she searched for the right words, Sharon completed her thought “...it’s just that it’s a side of your father I never really got to know.” Then she, too, stood and all three of them left the room.



# SEVEN

*Tender are their little hearts...*

Another breakfast, another letter. But this time the kids requested that they move from the dining room to the picnic table under the sheltering maples in the back yard.

“It’s so nice out, Mom,” Sarah explained, “and I just want to be outside.”

“Me, too,” Daniel added. “Let’s soak up as much of this sun as we can. You’re looking a little pale anyway. Okay?”

“Okay. You convinced me,” Sharon agreed. “But we’ll have to leave the china and crystal inside. Will regular dishes do?”

“Thank God!” Daniel exclaimed. “I get worried when I wash the good stuff. How about using paper plates? Then I don’t have to wash at all.”

“Not so fast, young man!” Sharon laughed. Knowing what Sharon would say to Daniel’s request, Sarah was already pulling the everyday dishes out of the cupboard and putting them on a tray to be carried outside. “We still want to make these breakfast meetings very special. But I feel like moving outside this morning, too. Pick what kind of cereal you want and let’s get out there,” she said as she picked up the crystal punch bowl containing the remaining letters and headed out the back door to the picnic table.

The truth was that all three of them were ready to revert back to more normal breakfasts. And all three of them were equally eager to read the rest of the letters as planned. The ritual had turned into a time for the family to process the sudden loss of Lucas as well as a time to get to know a side of him they somehow missed at home. They were all amazed and deeply touched to discover how many people he had helped in so many different places along the Maine Coast. None of them, however, were in the least surprised to hear that he had met most of them either at or

near a lighthouse. The family couldn't even begin to remember how many times Lucas had piled them into the car with a hasty lunch thrown into the picnic basket so they could visit a lighthouse he was anxious to see in person. He had such an affinity for lighthouses that the whole family was now interested in them.

Not standing on ceremony as they had the past few days felt good and since it was Daniel's turn to read the next letter, Sarah passed him the punch bowl as soon as everyone was finished eating so he could choose an envelope. He opened the letter and began to read.

*Dear Mrs. DeVitus, Daniel, and Sarah,*

*We wanted to let you know how truly sad we are that Lucas is no longer with us. He was a fine man who had an uncanny way of seeing into people's hearts and somehow knowing what needs were in there. And he didn't stop there. He went out of his way to share an encouraging word, or plant an idea that would help people grow or move in a different direction that would resolve a conflict from their pasts. That's the way it was with both of us. We'd like to share with you how just a few sentences from Lucas changed our lives forever.*

*You can probably guess that I am the one writing this for both of us, but my husband, William, is right here giving me his thoughts and opinions. My name is Susan. We have been married for 25 years now.*

*We met Lucas on a Wednesday in July five years ago at the park near West Quoddy Light in Lubec, about 50 miles from Calais where we live. We were on vacation and enjoying our time away from our jobs but the vacation had been nothing exciting or memorable—until we met Lucas.*

*We had both been in our jobs long enough to be at the top of the pay scale at each of our companies and we each had four weeks of vacation every year. My own attitude toward my job was simply, another day, another dollar. The benefits were good, but there was no challenge in what I did and I was beginning to wonder what my life was going to be like for the next thirty years until I could retire. William was different from me in that he actually liked doing the same old thing every day. On his job in the city planning office nobody expected him to come up with earth-shaking ideas to improve the Calais waterfront, so he didn't even think about it. Why bother? he would ask. I*

*could never think of a good answer. We were sort of stuck in a dead-end kind of life.*

*It wasn't that either of us would ever be called failures. We both had college educations and had both been invited to join Mensa, but neither of us had ever been ambitious or had great expectations. I guess you'd say we were lacking drive. We didn't want much in life and that's about what we got. We were contented with our lives and with each other. Now that we look back on it, it was kind of sad that we wasted or completely missed many opportunities I'm sure came our way. We just didn't look for them so we didn't recognize them when they presented themselves. We were in a comfortable rut, no question.*

*In all the necessities in life, we were fine. But we had not been able to have children, so we had none of the attendant problems children bring with them. (Nor any of the joys either.) Both William's parents and mine had died during the first five years of our marriage, so we had no elderly relatives to take care of. We were both content to remain as we were: going to lecture series on subjects that interested us, attending chamber music concerts, and reading deep theological books and then discussing them with each other.*

*Everyone we knew thought we had it all together, but deep down inside our marriage, something wasn't quite right. It bothered me until I decided to find out what it was and do something about it. Neither one of us talked much about it and I couldn't put my finger on the reason then, but now we both know there was a lack of purpose in our lives and it manifested as plain old boredom! I began to wonder how we could start to add some fun and excitement to our lives. I talked to William and he wasn't opposed to trying something new, but what?*

*That was when we went on vacation to West Quoddy Head and met your Lucas. He was sitting at a picnic table alone. All the other tables were occupied and when he saw our picnic basket he waved us over to join him. We did, although William says he was thinking, What in the world are we going to talk about with this man we've never met? We needn't have worried. Lucas made us instantly comfortable by telling us the history of the lighthouse. And then we and he began to share things about ourselves.*

*In just a few minutes of normal conversation we learned what he did for work and he asked us what we did. He must have sensed our need to make a change in our lifestyle as we talked about our jobs, because he asked if we had any time to volunteer and wanted to know if we had any children. Then he began telling us about the need for children to have solid role models and adult mentors in their lives. He told us a little about his own childhood and how much the role models in his life had meant to him. He told us about a*

*mentoring program that had offices all over the state and said he was sure there was an office in Calais.*

*William's initial response to Lucas was a single word: Why? That's when I began to get excited. To me, this sounded like the very thing that could not only turn our lives around but also help a child or two have better lives. As Lucas shared the general concepts behind mentoring programs, I began to see that William and I could actually make a difference in this world. Lucas explained that many of these programs are for kids whose fathers have abused and abandoned them or whose fathers have been incarcerated and can't be the parents for them that they were meant to be. He said these children have an emptiness in their hearts that most people can't imagine and that all they need is hope and a caring person to help guide them.*

*Lucas continued, reminding us that we had already told him that our jobs were secure, we didn't need anything, the house was almost paid for, and both our cars were only two years old. We had every evening and every weekend on our hands. We had time and experience and love to offer. "Why **not** do it?" he asked.*

*Although I could see William was softening, his response was that we were too old. I countered that you were never too old to help a child and besides, neither one of us was anywhere near old. He wanted to know how much time it would take. I said it would probably take all we were willing to give. William finally ran out of objections. Lucas had been listening to us banter back and forth and by this time he was grinning.*

*So we agreed to give it a try. For the first time in years, I felt a little wave of anticipation. This was going to be great! And it was going to make such a difference in our lives and in the lives of the children we might be able to help. I couldn't wait to get started.*

*We talked about it for a couple of days and then we called information for the phone number of the office of the mentoring program in Calais. We cut our vacation short so we could meet with the counselor as soon as possible. It went well. William asked all his questions and received all the answers. By the time we left, he was hooked. On the way home that day, I realized we both had smiles on our faces and we were talking and making plans with an excitement we had not experienced together for years. We were feeling something that had been missing in our lives: joy. The joy that comes from helping others with no thought of reward other than feeling good about doing it. But I have to tell you; it was the poem that Lucas sent us that opened our hearts to how important our new purpose would be in the lives of children who've lost the guidance of a loving parent. The poem, which I've enclosed, had William and me crying and opened up a flow of love and compassion in our*

hearts for the many children we would be able help—all of whom we hadn't even met yet.

*We've been blessed beyond all our expectations through the kids we've mentored over these five years, and we've shared those blessings with Lucas. Yes, he became a close friend of ours by calling us every so often to see how things were going. We kept him in the loop by sending him photos of us doing things with the different kids we've mentored.*

*Neither William nor I will ever forget what Lucas did for us that day at West Quoddy Light. He opened our minds to the possibility of making a difference and it has made a tremendous difference in our lives as well. We had always liked being around children and had tried repeatedly to have kids of our own. But it was not meant to be. Now, through the mentor program, we could enjoy kids and make a difference in their lives.*

*We have talked often of what might have happened to our marriage if Lucas hadn't challenged us to show children that there really are people who care about them and want to help them. Because of his insights, our involvement in the lives of the children we've mentored has brought smiles to our faces and a purpose into our lives. Our marriage is more solid and fulfilling than it had ever been before. And we owe it all to a caring and insightful man named Lucas DeVitus.*

*We hope this letter has conveyed to you our gratitude to him and that somehow our story will be a small part of the silver lining in the clouds of your grief at his loss. We know it will take time for you to adjust to being without him and we want you to know that we will send many good thoughts your way.*

*We would be pleased if you wanted to keep in touch with us, but will understand if you do not.*

*Sincerely,*

*William and Susan Wilcox*

Daniel unfolded the poem and began to read...

**And So It Goes—Unless...**

Tender are their little hearts  
So full of precious love

They sit and watch as Dad departs.  
All sent from up above,

They wonder what they did to make  
Their special daddy go.  
Their little hearts that he did break  
Will struggle now to grow.

They know not what has caused this thing  
To make their daddy leave.  
The hell that's present in his heart  
Their souls could not conceive.

Confused they sit and cry to whom  
Their precious hearts don't know,  
For daddy never taught them who  
Does set their hearts aglow.

So sad and common is the way  
That dads impart despair  
To tender hearts not yet to stray.  
Dads pass on pain and fear.

Dads know not what they do to these  
So precious little gifts.  
But do they not? Or is it that  
Their weakened hearts just drift?

The pain from hell that they themselves  
Have yet to set aside  
Has blocked their view of hell's mad plan  
They struggle to deride,

To stop the hell that they expand  
Through guiltless hearts so fair.  
But soon those hearts will take the seed  
And plant it unaware.

So on it goes from hell below  
To dads and to their kids,  
Until the ones who start to slow  
The hell that God forbids.

Daniel put down the letter and looked at his mother and sister. Then he surprised even himself by asking, “Do we have a mentoring program here?”

Both Sharon and Sarah said they weren’t sure. Then Sarah made an observation.

“Mom, are you getting the same idea that I am from all these letters?”

“Well, I am getting an idea, but I don’t know if it’s the same as your idea. Want to share?” Sharon smiled at Sarah who was deep in thought.

“Daniel?” Sarah turned to her brother who looked as if he wasn’t quite sure he was going to say what he was really thinking.

“I’m thinking that there was a side of Dad that we really didn’t know. I’m thinking I’d like to meet these people who have written us to tell us things about Dad that we would have never known if he hadn’t died. I’m thinking we should take a trip this summer to visit as many of these people as we can. What do you think?”

“I’d love that!” Sarah was plainly thinking along the same lines. And Sharon was in synch with them both.

“I have been thinking the same thing,” she responded. “One of you go and get the atlas out of the car and the other one help me clear the table. Let’s see if this idea will fly.”

Sarah laughed as she removed dishes and said, “Mom, no one uses an Atlas anymore. Maps are on the Internet now” as

Daniel removed the remains of breakfast and came back with the other letters they had already read. For the next hour the three of them plotted a route online and made tentative plans for a family vacation, most likely in early August. They imagined it would be a trip that would have several more stops added before the reading of the letters was completed.



Spring Point Light



# EIGHT

*If a flower could think, would it still be a flower...*

Day six of the letter-reading ritual dawned gray and wet with rain pelting the side of the house and wind whipping the leaves of the maple trees over the picnic table.

“Do you think Dad’s trying to tell us to eat inside today?” Daniel asked as he and his sister and mother stood side by side looking out at where they had hoped to eat breakfast.

“Seems obvious to me,” Sharon grinned and went to set the table. The kids turned and pulled their own breakfast choices from the cupboards and the refrigerator. After they had finished eating and had cleared the table, they were ready to read the next letter.

But before Sarah reached into the pile to pick another letter she wanted to share something with her mom and brother. “Daniel” she said “Do you remember when Dad gave us these books one Christmas when we were little?” as she placed two small children’s books on the table. Each looked exactly the same with a beautiful abstract image on the front decorated in bright Christmas reds and greens. “I think so” said Daniel, as he picked one up to read it. As Daniel opened the book Sharon began to cry.

“I remember,” she said. “It was during the period I told you about when he was fasting and meditating and writing lots of poetry. I remember how surprised everyone was because they looked like real books published and sold at the book store.” As Daniel flipped through his book he commented “...and all of these images were created by Dad, too, if I remember correctly.” “Yes,” said Sarah. “Do you mind if I read it aloud?” “No,” they both replied. Sarah began to read.

## The Very First Christmas Gift

My little ones,  
I have a Gift  
But not a toy  
That you can lift.

It can't be wrapped  
Or opened up  
Or played with like  
A little pup.

It's not my Gift  
To give to you  
But one I found.  
Yes, this is true.

It's been around  
For many years  
And every year  
It reappears.

You may not see  
This precious Gift  
But it is there  
Like snow adrift.

It's everywhere,  
If you will see,  
But not a toy  
Under a tree.

It used to be  
This Gift, I say,  
Was all there was  
On Christmas Day.

Though it's still there,  
It's been replaced  
By toys and clothes  
And people's haste.

But years have passed  
And people lost  
This precious Gift  
That has no cost.

But I've re-found  
This Gift of joy  
I pass to you  
Unlike a toy.

It's how this day  
Has come to be  
Before there was  
A Christmas tree.

This first Gift came  
So long ago  
And Christmas Day  
We came to know.

For Christmas was  
Unknown, you see,

Before the Gift  
Had come to be.

But though the Gift  
May not seem there,  
Through all the noise  
And Christmas cheer.

Don't worry now.  
Someday you'll see  
This Christmas Gift  
As clear as me.

So go have fun.  
Enjoy this day.  
Make sure to laugh.  
Make sure to play.

And in your heart  
You may just see  
This Christmas Gift  
Of Love from me.

Sarah's eyes were filled with tears but she was smiling as she closed the book. "It's the last stanza that got me," she explained. "I'm remembering again when Dad used to put us to bed at night and I would be afraid for him to go, and he would point to my heart and put his finger right here," she pointed to the approximate location of her heart, "and he would say, don't worry. Daddy is always with you no matter where you go. He is right here in your heart for always." Each of them sat quietly for the next few moments as if to feel Lucas' presence within their hearts.

“Wait a minute,” Daniel said, as he interrupted the silence. “Do you remember one night when Dad read us a poem about how a flower grows?” “Yes,” said Sarah. “I remember it because you were doing a homework assignment that night on flowers and how they grow and I was being a pain in the butt trying to get Dad’s attention while he was helping you. I remember this because I was trying to understand what he was telling you and, as I used to always do when I couldn’t grasp something, I was throwing a mini-tantrum trying to get him to explain it better.” Daniel interrupted, “Yeah, and I didn’t understand what he was saying either but I just wanted to get it over with. He finally said, ‘Okay, it’s time for bed anyway and I have a nice story to tell you that will help both of you understand what makes a flower grow.’”

Sarah interrupted, “Believe it or not I think I know where that poem is, now that you’ve reminded us of it. I found it under the bed a few days later and put it in my nightstand drawer. It must still be there.” Sarah ran to her bedroom with anticipation. There it was folded up in the back of the drawer as she pushed everything aside to find it. She ran back downstairs waving the piece of paper. Looking at Sharon she said, “I remember that we brushed our teeth and got into bed to hear Dad’s story. In he walked in one of his silly/serious modes—with a sheet of paper in his hands and said, “Okay, now close your eyes and get ready to learn what you and a flower have in common.”

Sarah held up the crinkled paper and began to read.

### *How a Flower Grows*

Did you ever wonder how  
A flower starts to grow?

A little seed awaits its call  
In soil down below.

In darkness it just sits and waits  
With faith that it will see.

The beauty of a sunrise is  
Its cosmic guarantee.

But what brings forth this petaled gift  
That starts out in the dark

To grow and live a perfect life?  
From whither comes the spark?

And what of you who started from  
A lonely little seed

To grow and live upon this earth?  
From where does life proceed?

The force that makes a flower grow  
Is from a place unknown

And from this force comes all of you  
And from it you have grown.

But does the flower generate  
The life from which it springs?

Or does it just receive the flow  
From which it spreads its wings?

And in this flow, design appears  
Revealing there must be

Intelligence within its stream  
From where you cannot see.

And what of *you*? Is there a plan  
That flows from this strange force

To guide you through this life of yours?  
Does it come from a source?

And if it does, what makes you think  
That thinking is the way

To guide your life and make your plans  
As you go through your day?

Why not accept that you are not  
The maker of the plan

And let the flower show you how  
To be the perfect man?

For when you do your purpose will  
Flow through you like the rose

And you will see that what makes you  
Is how a flower grows.

As Sarah finished the poem, Daniel had a realization. “All these poems. . . . It seems so weird. It’s like they were part of Dad’s purpose in life.” Sarah jumped in. “Yeah, so far each letter has had a poem included. It’s strange that all of these people felt that the poem was so important that they needed to include it. It almost seems planned.”

“I see what you mean,” Sharon nodded, “but these people probably didn’t know each other so it seems to me that the poems

were the thing that really drove your father’s message home to them.”

“The poems were like Dad’s calling card. I know I already said that before,” Daniel continued, “but it’s just so weird.”

“But at the same time so beautiful!” Sarah decided to complete Daniel’s thought.

“Look at the time. It’s getting late,” Sharon remarked. “Shouldn’t we read a letter from the punch bowl?”

Sarah reached into the bowl saying, “Definitely. It’s my turn and I don’t want to miss it!” She pulled out a beige envelope. She slit the flap with the letter opener and unfolded several sheets of notebook paper neatly hand-printed in blue ink. She didn’t have to look to see who had written them. They were all familiar with Father Pete’s meticulous hand-writing because he had sent them so many cards and hand-printed notes over the years. Sarah grinned at Daniel as she held up the pages for them to see and then began to read.

*Dear Second Family,*

*I’m writing this letter because I know there won’t be an opportunity to express my thoughts to you after the funeral and I want you to know one of the reasons Lucas meant so much to me.*

*During my seminary training I had eagerly soaked up all the precepts and subject matter prescribed and presented to those of us preparing for the ministry. I loved it all and I bought it all, never questioning or doubting the wisdom and correctness of what I was to do or teach. I totally immersed myself in all of it, reveling in what I considered my unquestionable call into the ministry. I was preparing for the day when I would be the pastor of a flock of believers who would appreciate (and apply) the truths I would impart in my weekly homilies. I was like the fledgling in the nest, opening my mouth wide and expecting my professors to fill it with what I’d need in order to have an effective ministry.*

*I won’t repeat the story of how Lucas and I met because you’ve all seen the red T-bird and know how passionate I was about it in my seminary days. (The truth is I am still that passionate about it) I love that car for many*

reasons, but perhaps the most important one is that it was the instrument God used in my life to bring Lucas and me together.

*As the friendship grew between Lucas and me, we talked more and more deeply about the church and where God fit into it. (I know that wording sounds strange and incorrect, but bear with me while I make a valid point.) Lucas pointed out to me that being in a garage doesn't make a person a car and being in a church building doesn't make a person a believer in God. Many people go to church because they were taught to do so as children. Others do not give God a place in their homes, their businesses, nor their hearts, but they sit in the pews at Easter and Christmas and think they've given God his due. Lucas was vitally concerned not so much about church attendance as he was about people's personal relationships with God. And rightly so, for that is what this life is all about.*

*Then one day Lucas vented his own personal frustration with the organized church. That was a discussion I will never forget, because it changed both me and my ministry forever. The bottom line for Lucas was that the church can sometimes get caught up in its own dogma and lose sight of its one true purpose: to bring people to God. He said that the dryness and stiffness had turned him off instead of drawing him closer to God. He maintained that the organized church had missed God's point, and that both irritated Lucas and saddened him.*

*I was stunned by the strength of his revelations and I said so. He replied that this was not something new, but that he had come to these conclusions as a result of spending time alone with God on all those business trips he took up and down the coast. He said that he had always felt closest to God when he was within sight of a lighthouse. (He had told me earlier about Father Frank and the lesson he had taught the West End Reds at Portland Head Light when Lucas was a young boy.) I believe that is why he always made it a point to visit as many lighthouses as possible. He seemed to glean strength from being near them because they reminded him of God's steadfastness and endurance. I feel that way about lighthouses, too, so I could relate to him on that level. Several times Lucas and I met at Spring Point Light just to talk or share a sandwich for lunch.*

*All of this serious discussion with Lucas forced me to consider the points he had made so adamantly. After much soul-searching, I came to the same conclusion as Lucas: The church was its own worst enemy in fulfilling the purpose for which God created it. I marveled that someone who had neither*

*attended seminary nor attended church regularly could have zeroed in so accurately on the bottom line.*

*This realization challenged me to my core. I struggled with leaving the ministry. I even thought of leaving the church. When I shared my spiritual dilemma with Lucas, strangely enough, he was the one who convinced me to stay in the ministry. He reminded me that God had called me into the ministry and until God himself told me to leave, I had better stay where I was. I argued that Lucas himself had walked away from the organized church. He answered that God had not called him to be a priest. I replied that in a very real sense, the word priest is not just a noun, it's also a verb. We all priest each other as we go through life's ups and downs and when we reach out to help someone, we are acting as a priest. He thought about that for a moment and then he looked me in the eye and said, "You're absolutely right. And as your priest, I'm telling you to stay where God put you!"*

*We both laughed long and loud over that one and the tension was broken for both of us. When we parted that day, Lucas told me he tended to agree with me, that he had indeed been priesting several people he had met and had found it both challenging and rewarding. He said he also felt that God had given him a weird calling into the priesthood, almost specifically to reveal where the church has gone wrong. He then told me the story of how he came to this conclusion and how he had been waiting for the opportunity to share it with me. There was a period in Lucas' life when he chose to focus within to search for answers. To make a long story short, it was during this period that many insights came to him in the form of poetry. At first he said he didn't know what to do with them but in time it became clear that these messages were meant for him to pass on to people in need. I was one of those people. He was reluctant at first to reveal the poem he believed was meant for me but after our conversation on this day he knew it was time. He promised to drop the poem off later that day but before he left he asked me if I thought I could be a better priest if I left the priesthood. That stopped me cold.*

*Lucas wisely said nothing while I explored that thought. Then I responded, "Lucas, I cannot imagine myself being anything other than a priest. I believe that's who I really am, whether it's in a church setting or sitting here talking with you."*

*He just grinned at me. Then he said, "Point made."*

*I replied, "Point taken." And then we laughed together again and he was on his way.*

*Later that day Lucas came by to deliver the poem. He asked me not to read it until he was gone. Once he left I sat in one of the pews and said a small prayer before I read it. That day changed me forever and transformed my ministry in ways I could never have imagined. I've enclosed the poem for you to read. It is perfect and I will cherish it and the memory of Lucas for the rest of my life and beyond.*

*If we had not had that discussion, I do not know if I would still be in the priesthood. But here I am, still trying to do God's work in the arena where he has placed me. And it was Lucas who crystallized my calling. For this, I will be eternally grateful to the man I called my dearest friend.*

*In the love of God, who called us all to priest each other,  
Father Pete*

Sarah didn't hesitate but went right on, reading the poem they all expected.

## God's House

What is this church  
That you go to  
That's run by mortal men

Who think they have  
The key to life  
But most don't comprehend?

The church that's written  
Of in books  
Is not of brick and mortar;

It's you who holds  
The Holy Grail  
Within your fleshly border.

The temple of  
The living God  
Is staring straight at you.

When you look in a mirror,  
You'll behold it  
In your view.

Within the book  
It says that you  
Are where the truth is told.

Inside your heart  
Is where the truth  
Was hidden to behold.

So shake the binds  
Of preachers who  
Will lead your soul astray.

And look inside  
To find the One  
And He will show the way.

The message in the Book  
That preachers try  
To comprehend

Is dead as it  
Comes out to you  
From broken mortal men.

The word it kills  
When not joined by  
The spirit of the One

Who sent the word  
For us to hear  
From His immortal Son.

The spirit placed  
Inside your heart  
Reveals the mystery

That's written in  
The greatest book  
Without which you can't see.

But don't condemn  
The preacher who  
Is one lost lonely soul.

Just listen to  
The message, not  
The man who makes it cold.

And then one day  
You may just see  
That church is not a place

That's built from brick  
And mortar which  
Cannot contain His grace.

So look inside  
And you will find  
The church given to man

Is flesh and blood  
Enlightened by  
The only One who can.

When Sarah put the letter down, no one said anything for a few seconds and then all three of them began talking at once.

“This makes total sense,” Daniel said with a look of revelation.

“That letter explains a lot,” Sharon mused aloud.

“Imagine me, a priest!” Sarah giggled.

Three different people; three different reactions. All of them valid.

Then what their mother had said registered in both Sarah and Daniel and they turned to her with questions on their faces. Sharon took a deep breath and plunged in.

“I always knew Lucas was not totally at peace with the church, but I never really understood why. He would go to church with me occasionally, but most of the time he chose instead to spend time at one of the lighthouses in our area. He said that was *church* for him. Father Pete explained it well, I think, don’t you?”

Daniel agreed, but Sarah withheld comment. Her mother asked for her thoughts on the subject.

“I don’t know *what* I think about that, Mom. I guess I really don’t see why Dad felt that way, but it sounds as if he *did* have strong feelings about the subject. But I remember his going to church with us as a family on Christmas Eve when we were little. Or did I dream that?”

“You didn’t dream it,” Daniel answered. “I remember it, too.”

“I remember it well,” Sharon added. “Now I’m wondering if he went with us just to please me because he knew I wanted us to go as a family.”

“Wouldn’t that be alright?” Daniel asked.

“Sure,” Sharon replied. “If your father was disillusioned with the organized church, he was never disillusioned with God. I know that he had a very personal relationship with Him. And I know he never did anything half-way. He either did it all the way or he didn’t do it at all. When he was somewhere, he was 100% there. So if he chose to accompany us to church, you can be sure he was 100% there while he was there.”

“I liked that about Dad,” Daniel added.

“I liked *Dad*,” Sarah said with feeling. “He was a great man and from the letters and poems, I think others felt that way, too.”

“I agree,” Sharon said.

“I hope we can think of some way to carry on his idea of priesting the people in our lives,” Sarah said. “Does that sound too over the top?”

“Not at all,” Sharon reached over and took one of Sarah’s hands and then one of Daniel’s. “We are the DeVitus family and we can carry on Dad’s legacy of helping others. I’m just not sure how we’ll do that, but I believe we’ll know when the right idea comes along.”

“Sounds good to me,” Daniel said as he stood up. “Got to go, Mom. Jeff’s meeting me at 10 to shoot some hoops.”

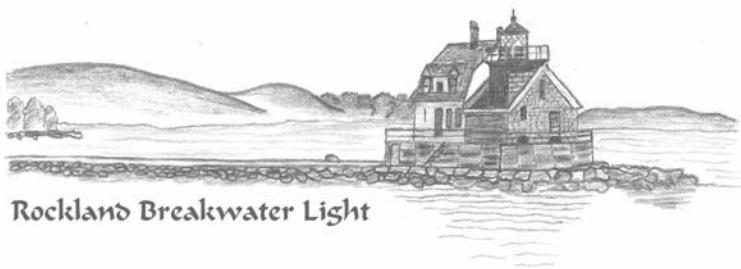
“Me, too,” Sarah added. “Amanda’s mom invited me to go shopping with them, remember? They’ll be here in ten minutes.”

Sharon glanced at both of her children and realized with a pang that they each had lives of their own.

“Sure, go ahead,” she smiled at both of them as she reminded herself they were growing up to be very special people. As Daniel headed out the kitchen door, Sarah went down the hall to her room to get ready to leave. Sharon sat at the dining room table with her chin in her right hand, her left hand still holding Father Pete’s letter as she considered its contents. *Lucas, you were truly amazing*, she

thought. *Sometimes I think I knew you pretty well. And then sometimes I wonder why I didn't know you better.*





Rockland Breakwater Light

# NINE

*Love is not a feeling...*

The next morning was sunny and bright and the family moved back out to the picnic table under the maples for breakfast. After the meal all three of them cleared the table and Daniel brought the crystal punch bowl outside, placing it in the center of the table. It was Sharon's turn to choose a letter and read it aloud. The bowl was about half full of envelopes now and she stopped with her hand mid-air to say what was in her heart to Daniel and Sarah.

"I don't know how you two feel about the letters we've read so far but as far as I'm concerned, your father met some wonderful people and getting to know them through their letters has really impressed me. Do you feel that way, too?"

Sarah nodded her head emphatically, saying, "Absolutely." Daniel agreed.

"Go ahead, Mom. I want to hear today's letter." He pushed the punch bowl toward Sharon and she stirred the remaining letters a bit and, without looking, chose a bright yellow envelope with a red daisy on it, opened it and began to read.

*Dear Family of Lucas DeVitus,*

*I wanted to thank you for having such a wonderful husband and father. I only met him three months ago and we were only together for about two hours, but he changed my life that night. The sad part is that I didn't get to tell him about it and thank him for what he did for me.*

*Before I met Lucas I had been told many times by many people that I had a bad attitude. I always answered that I didn't have an attitude; I had an ATTITUDE! Even though I just turned sixteen, I know now that my attitude toward my attitude was wrong.*

*Ever since I remember I've been in a hurry to grow up. My impatience made me take risks and I began shoplifting when I was thirteen. I had my first beer on my fourteenth birthday, which I celebrated with four 17-year-old boys. That was also the first time I had sex. I learned I could get almost anything I wanted if I gave guys what they wanted.*

*Please bear with my bluntness. I believe you will need to know the real me in order to understand the impact Lucas had on me.*

*Living on the edge was what excited me, so when I met Jason and Jeff at a dance and they invited me to go for a ride with them, I said yes without even thinking. I was fifteen at the time. I sat between them in Jason's truck and for the first hour it was more fun than I'd ever had before. Then Jeff suggested we take it up a notch and stop for some beer at the next liquor store. I agreed. What I didn't know was that Jason had brought a gun with him from home. I was so dumb I thought they'd just pay for the beer and we'd leave. But that's not what happened.*

*Both Jeff and Jason had been drinking beer in the truck since we had left the dance. The truck crossed the yellow line several times as Jason drove. That should have given me a clue, but it didn't. I was having too much fun and feeling too grown up. So grown up that I offered to drive the truck. How hard could it be? Just step on the gas and aim the truck, right?*

*Jason and Jeff laughed at me, but they thought it would be cool to have a girl drive their getaway truck, because holding up the liquor store was what they had planned all along. I had just made it a whole lot easier for them.*

*Jason stopped the truck and helped me slide over his lap to the driver's seat. All I had to do was put it in drive and step on the gas. In a few blocks I felt in control. It felt so good—until Jeff pointed at a liquor store and told me to pull over. There were lots of empty spaces so I didn't have to parallel park. When I started to turn the engine off, Jason stopped me with his hand, explaining they were going to be in a hurry when they came out and would need to take off right away. I ignored the little feeling of fear that ran through me and did what he said. Then I saw the handle of the gun in Jason's pocket as he got out of the truck and I knew I was in deep trouble if they got caught.*

*I froze behind the wheel, just long enough to hear two shots and see the guys start running out of the store. That got my brain moving and I threw open the driver's door and jumped out, running into the woods across the road as fast as I could. I dove under a pile of brush and kept quiet in case they came after*

*me, but I didn't need to worry. They were in so much of a hurry that they took off in the truck without me.*

*I stayed there shaking in the dark for about an hour and then I began walking. I always walked when I was upset and I soon came upon the road that led to the Rockland Breakwater, a place that had always calmed me down when I was younger and we had lived nearby. I used to walk out on the breakwater and, surrounded by water, all my troubles would seem to wash away. I was standing there trying to decide if I wanted to walk out on the breakwater at this time of night when I saw a car coming down the breakwater road toward me. By this time it was about two in the morning. I stuck out my thumb for a ride. The car stopped and the man driving offered me a ride. I didn't care who it was, I took the offer and settled in for a quiet ride. I had a lot of thinking to do and I didn't want to be interrupted.*

*But the driver of the car had other ideas. He wanted to talk. He began asking questions. Was I okay? Where was I going? Was there someone he should call to say I was alright? He said "I have a daughter about your age and if she were in trouble - especially at this time of night - I would want to know, to be there for her. I didn't want to talk, but he seemed so nice and sounded like he really cared about me and I kind of needed that right then. So I told him the whole story, including my bad attitude and my desire to grow up right away.*

*I liked it that he didn't tell me all the mistakes I had made. (I already knew what they were.) I liked it that he didn't preach at me, even though he mentioned God a few times. He made me feel safe and I felt okay being with him. He told me his name was Lucas DeVitus and gave me his business card. He said I could call him if I ever needed help and he would do what he could for me. He was so nice to me that I offered to have sex with him as a thank-you. It was just what I did. I used sex as the answer to everything. I wanted so desperately to be wanted and thought that sex was the answer since that's what every boy (or man for that matter) I had ever met wanted. He turned me down firmly, but nicely, telling me that I didn't need to use sex as a substitute for love.*

*It took about an hour to drive to where I lived with my father's girlfriend in a two-room apartment. My father wasn't around much, but when he was around, he was at her place, paying attention to her—not me. She was a good friend to me though. During the ride Lucas and I talked a lot—about all kinds of things.*

*He didn't need to drive me all the way to the apartment, but he did, even though I had asked him to just drop me downtown and I'd walk from there. He went out of his way to help me and so I listened to him. No one had ever gone that far out of the way for me before without me having to pay them back—if you know what I mean. He said, I'd tell you that you're looking for love in all the wrong places but the truth is that you don't even know what love is. He then said look into my eyes, and I did. They were the most beautiful eyes I had ever seen, though I couldn't even tell you what they looked like. It had nothing to do with the physical attractiveness of his eyes, it was what was behind them that drew me in. He then said, what you see there is love. Love is not sex. Love is not when a man looks at you longingly with his own selfish needs in mind. Love is pure. Love is kindness and patience. Love is when someone unselfishly cares about your needs over theirs.*

*When I got out of the car in front of the apartment I was a bit numb from the experience, I thanked him for what he had done for me and agreed to call him if I needed help. Before I could close the door he handed me a piece of paper. He said "Here, I was reading this just before I met you. It's something I wrote several months ago but it seems like it was meant for you." It was a poem that perfectly summed up the message that Lucas was trying to say to me that night. I've enclosed it. It is beautiful. It still freaks me out to think that he had it right there to hand to me when he dropped me off. It was almost like it was written in a script.*

*Unfortunately I never did get a chance to tell Lucas that he changed my life that night and things got better for me. He taught me what real love is and that there were people in this world who cared, even if they were strangers to me. I began to see the phony love that boys had used to get me to be with them. I began recognizing the mistakes I had made. And I began to change my life. I didn't call Lucas because I wanted to be a better person before I called him and thanked him. Now I can't thank him because he is gone. That makes me sad for myself and for all of you, but happy for Lucas because I know if there is a heaven, he is in it.*

*I just wanted you to know that there is at least one person in this world whose life is better because of knowing Lucas. I'm sure there are many more than just myself. I am sorry that Lucas is no longer here to help others as he helped me. In a strange sort of way I think I really discovered what true love is the night I met Lucas.*

*I have a part-time job now and I am planning on finishing school. I've met a boy with eyes like Lucas had and now his poem is crystal clear to me. I*

*will never forget that night as long as I live and I will never forget Lucas DeVitus. He is my hero, no question.*

*God bless you,  
Abbie Finnigan*

A bit choked up, Sharon began to read the poem.

### True Love

Love is not  
That fleeting sense  
That catches you  
Through false pretense.

It's more than that,  
Won't you agree?  
That love takes flight  
When once you see

That making love  
Is just a game  
Two lovers play  
To stake their claim.

But once it's through  
Few lovers see  
That making love  
Does not come free.

So careful now  
With whom you take

For love's desire  
Your heart may break.

For true love starts  
When "loving" ends  
And lover's hearts  
Become true friends.

And when love's marked  
By chaste respect  
Of lovers whose  
Love does perfect.

You'll know you're there  
For safe you'll be  
In lover's arms  
You'll share the key.

So watch your step  
Don't fall aflat  
Don't heed that pull  
Heart's pitter-pat.

Go look beyond  
That fleeting glow  
To something deep  
More apropos.

But please let me  
Assure your heart  
That making love  
Does not depart.

For 'tis not that  
Love-making's bad  
Nor that it means  
That you've been had.

It's simply that  
True love is real  
And making love  
Just seals the deal.

When Sharon finished reading she put the letter back in the envelope and looked up at Sarah, who seemed to be deep in thought. "Are you okay?" Sharon asked.

Sarah took a moment to refocus as she raised her eyes to meet her Mom's. "Yeah. I'm fine, Mom," she said as she glanced back towards the faded wooden bench in the far corner of the yard. "I'm just remembering a conversation I had with Dad a few weeks ago. It was very similar to some of the things he wrote in that poem."

Daniel, looking as if he was remembering something of his own, got up and walked over to sit beside his sister. "He tried to have a conversation with me, too, on this subject," he added. "I remember playing catch with him one day and out of nowhere he started asking me questions about my feelings for Molly. I remember him trying to explain to me what it really meant to love someone. I remember thinking, what the heck is he telling me this for? I don't love Molly. I didn't get it then, but I do now," he said, glancing towards the opposite corner of the yard where he and his father would often play catch when Lucas got home early enough from work.

Sharon watched as her two children were remembering precious moments with their father. Her heart was breaking knowing no new moments would be forthcoming.

As she caught herself starting to break down she quickly regained her composure so she wouldn't interrupt their reverie.

After a few moments of silence Sharon got up from the table and said, "I'd like to meet that girl! I think we'd like her."

Sarah nodded. "I'd like to meet her too. I'd like to tell her how proud Dad would be of her and how she's turned her life around."

Daniel just looked at them both with a curious expression on his face before he said, "I wonder just how cute she really is."

And then all three of them laughed until their sides hurt.





Pemaquid Point Light

# TEN

*There is a message in stillness—You will not hear it in words...*

The next morning Sharon surprised everyone by suggesting she make pancakes for breakfast. Two instant positive responses had Daniel popping the pre-cooked bacon into the microwave while Sarah grabbed the maple syrup from the refrigerator.

When the meal was finished they all helped clear the table.

“You know, Mom...” Sarah ventured as they were removing the last traces of the meal and placing the punch bowl in the center of the table in preparation for reading the next letter. “I’ve been thinking of ways that we could meet all of the people who wrote letters.”

“I thought about that, too,” Daniel spoke up. “What do you think, Mom?”

“I’m not sure, but I’ll bet we can figure it out together,” Sharon said thoughtfully. “For now, let’s get through the rest of the letters. I think it’s your turn to read, Daniel.” She pushed the punch bowl nearer to her son and watched as he pulled a pale gray linen-weave business envelope from the bowl.

“Okay. Here goes,” he said as he unfolded the typed letter. “Oh, God, this is a long one,” he murmured as he began reading.

*Dear Sharon, Daniel and Sarah,*

*I was so saddened to read of Lucas’ death in the paper because if it were not for him, I would not be the man I am today. I also want to tell you how your Lucas helped me learn an important principle that has totally changed my direction over the past four years.*

*I was a sales representative for a small radio station in the Midwest. I wasn't very good at it, mostly because my heart wasn't in it. But day after day I plodded along, trying to make a living while thinking there must be something else I could do that would be more interesting and make me more money.*

*While I was in this frame of mind I stopped at Moody's Diner on Route One in Waldoboro where the customers were always interesting and the food was always good, especially the homemade pies. All the time I was eating I mulled over in my mind what type of job I should be pursuing. My mind came up empty but at least my stomach was full. I stepped up to the cash register to pay my bill and got a good look into the kitchen. I saw one of the workers pouring used cooking oil from the deep fryer into a large metal can. I wondered what they did with the used oil. I paid my bill and on a whim, decided I needed to go someplace peaceful and think. I knew just the place.*

*Leaving Moody's I turned south onto Route One and in about 30 minutes I was standing at Pemaquid Point Light, one of my favorite places in the world. I had grown up in Damariscotta so I had been there many times, but it had been some time since I went there just to think something through. That's what I needed right now: a quiet, peaceful place to think and figure out what to do with my life. I was convinced I could do much more.*

*I walked out onto the Point, looking down as I stepped across the familiar rocks and not noticing a man right in front of me. He spoke to me and reached out to steady me as I looked up in surprise. I had been so lost in my own thoughts that I hadn't noticed that I was not alone. I apologized and he assured me I was forgiven. He said he was there to think also and had been thinking so hard he had nearly lost his balance a few minutes before I came along.*

*We exchanged first names and sat on the rocks together and struck up a conversation. He was very easy to talk to and before I knew it, I was telling him about my need to make a career change and my complete bafflement as to what I should do next.*

*He asked what my passions were. Passions? I said. Yes, the things that really excited me or made me want to get on a soapbox and motivate other people. I thought for a moment and then told him I really got excited about alternative sources of energy. Like what? Like biodiesel fuel to reduce our dependence on foreign oil production.*

*He asked me how biodiesel fuel was made. I explained several methods and types of fuel including recycling waste vegetable oil and how inexpensive it*

*is. And then I stopped mid-thought because it hit me square between the eyes: I had just seen waste vegetable oil being recycled this afternoon at Moody's Diner. Bingo!*

*I looked at Lucas and he looked at me and we both grinned at the same time. I was obviously excited about the idea. It was an emerging industry that needed to get the word out to the public through education, advertising and public relations. I had experience in all those areas. Was this my next career move?*

*We talked pros and cons and ideas and strategies for over an hour and a half until I couldn't sit on those rocks another minute. We exchanged business cards and he asked me to keep him posted on my progress. We walked to the parking lot together and promised to keep in touch. We waved goodbye and I didn't see him face to face again for a long time. But we did, indeed, keep in touch. We talked a couple of times a month. He was great at coming up with ideas to help me start my own waste vegetable oil recycling business. And that is exactly what I did. I named my company Pemaquid Biofuels and we specialized in vegetable oil conversions.*

*Within the first four years we were able to build five regional plants located across the country, all producing recycled waste vegetable oil collected from local restaurants. I was earning a great income, helping people save money on fuel for their vehicles while making the planet a safer and better place to live. It was the proverbial win-win situation. Yet for all my success, there was something missing in my life and I couldn't put my finger on it. It drove me crazy until one day I picked up the phone and called Lucas and asked if he could meet me at Pemaquid Point Light. He agreed with enthusiasm.*

*On the appointed day we met in the parking lot at the lighthouse and walked out onto the rocks where we once again sat and talked heart to heart. After exchanging the usual catching-up news on each other's lives, Lucas looked me straight in the eye and asked me if all was well with my soul.*

*My soul? I questioned in my mind, as I was taken aback by the sudden shift into a more personal topic., "I don't know." I said. There's definitely something missing, but I don't know what it is. Any ideas?" I asked hesitantly fearing I was about to meet a side of Lucas I didn't want to know.*

*He said he might have one. And then he suggested that perhaps I had concentrated so hard on making money that I had neglected my spiritual side. Though something rang true about what he said, something inside of me was still holding back but I decided to let him talk. For the next two hours he*

*talked about how each person needed to step away from their daily thoughts to allow a greater power to sort through the confusion. That everyday each and everyone of us should take the time to be still and let God catch up with us. I have to say the mention of God slowed me down a bit. That was the thing I was worried he was going to say. I had spent too many years in Catholic school and too many Sundays being force-fed a bunch of religious dogma that I had come to a point in my life where I had given up on the idea of an all-powerful God—especially given the state of the world as it is today. But Lucas immediately sensed my uneasiness and he quickly shifted his approach. “I hope the God thing didn’t offend you,” he said. “I can see you’re a little uneasy with what I’m saying.” I then felt a little bad because I didn’t want to offend Lucas who obviously seemed to be a man of God, but before I could figure out a way to recover he proceeded to obliterate any and all twisted concepts I had of who and what God was. I have to say—it blew me away. One by one he reset each preconceived notion I had about God and heaven and the church and the devil and many other things that had my mind tied in knots from preachers who forced dry Scripture down my throat.*

*He then scolded me, though with no condescension at all, and said how dare you allow other people’s thoughts and ideas rule your mind while allowing your common sense to go out the window. You don’t need a preacher or any human being to connect you to the power that lies within you. A friend, like me, can point you in the right direction, but it is up to you to go within and find God. And understand this, God is not an old man with a long white beard. God is not what foolish men have tried over the years to make him out to be. God is the source of everything you see and in truth he is not a he or a she. God is all. God is the universal intelligence behind every spinning molecule in the universe. God is what keeps it all spinning. If God were to suddenly not exist everything you see would disappear. God is a concept that is impossible to comprehend but the evidence exists all around you that there is an intelligence behind everything you see.*

*He then said one of the most profound things I had ever heard. Have you ever looked at the inner workings of a clock? Do you think it’s possible that if all of the parts of a clock were thrown individually into a pile that they would ever emerge as a working clock without an intelligent being picking them up and putting them together according to a plan? Then how can anybody possibly think that the universe, the most intricate clock known to man, with irrefutable laws that govern everything moving within it, could exist if there wasn’t an intelligence holding it all together? The problem is that most religions depict*

*God as some sort of super man-like being which makes it completely impossible for their followers to see the truth.*

*He then said, "Listen to me, Joel. The Bible is a beautiful book and it was truly inspired by the intelligence known to me as God but the words within will mean nothing to you if you don't go within to find the inner voice, the source that can illuminate the meaning of everything you see.*

*"When you sit still in a room with the purpose of connecting to that source your entire being will begin to shake. And if you don't try to block what you see—which will be all the selfish things you've ever done in your life, all the things that commonsense would have told you, if you had let it—the stillness, which is where God resides, will resolve your issues one by one. Years of confusion and frustration will melt into the stillness and your purpose on Earth will be revealed to you piece by piece. This is pure meditation or pure prayer, if you will. This is what they mean when they say God knows what you need before you ask. There is no need to construct selfish prayers asking for what you think you need. What you need is revealed through your spinning thoughts and when those spinning thoughts are held within a still mind, the stillness will resolve them. The stillness is God. There is no need for effort on your part. This is what is meant by let go and let God."*

*The speech ended as abruptly as it started and we made a date to meet again in two months—same time, same place. He drove home and so did I.*

*The next 30 days were the most amazing time in my life. I began searching for God in the still corners of my mind. Everyday I would learn something new. Problems just seemed to disappear as I allowed them to be viewed in the light of stillness. Recently I picked up a Bible and began to flip through and read random Scriptures. Every one of them jumped off the page. Things that never made sense to me were perfectly clear to my now more-clear mind. I am growing and I like what's happening to me. I feel totally alive in every aspect of my life: physical, mental and spiritual.*

*I couldn't wait to meet Lucas again and fill him in on everything that had happened to me since our last meeting. Just as I was getting ready to call him and set a date, I learned that he had died in a tragic car accident. I was devastated, to say the least. If I feel this bad, I cannot imagine what the three of you are going through. My heart goes out to all of you.*

*If I could talk with Lucas I would tell him what I have just shared with you. I would thank him for taking the time to talk with me and for caring enough to zero in on my spiritual needs. He was right on. That was what was*

*missing in my life, and my growing relationship with God has made all the difference—in my life, in my relationships, and in my business. I will be eternally grateful to Lucas. Someday I expect to be able to tell him these things in person when I get to where he is now. But for now, it helps to be able to tell you, his family, what a wonderful friend he was to me. My prayer is that I will be able to follow in his footsteps and be a friend to anyone in my sphere of influence.*

*In peace and love,*

*Joel Winters*

*P.S. I'm sharing a poem that Lucas sent me because I believe it might help you through this difficult time.*

Daniel read on.

## God Speak

God he speaks  
In strangest ways  
Though can't be heard  
Through daily daze.

His words are not  
What you would think;  
They're not in sounds  
They're not in ink.

He speaks to us  
In different ways;  
His message sets  
Our hearts ablaze.

In silence he  
Will rest your soul,  
To set you straight  
To his great goal.

But he won't force  
His will on you;  
You must decide  
To take your due.

So if you choose  
To hear his call,  
Release the noise,  
Suspend your fall.

For when you stop  
Your daily run,  
You'll hear his call.  
You'll know the one.

And when you do  
You'll surely see,  
And he'll reveal  
His mystery.

So take the time  
Each day and night,  
To slow your thoughts  
To cease your fight.

And you will hear  
Him speak to you  
In silent words  
You always knew.

As Daniel looked up from the letter and poem he had just read, both Sharon and Sarah were wiping their eyes with their napkins. Daniel wasn't crying, but he felt a strangely familiar stillness in his being. "Dad had an amazing way of explaining things that couldn't be explained," he said. "It's funny, but I really think I'm starting to get it."

Sharon nodded. Sarah didn't say anything. She just reached over and took Joel's letter out of Daniel's hands and began reading it again to herself.





Cape Elizabeth  
Light

# ELEVEN

*When we were young we learned the most powerful lessons...*

The next morning it was Sarah's turn to choose a letter from the punch bowl.

"I like the looks of this light green parchment business envelope," she said as she reached for it.

Sharon had a fleeting thought that someday her daughter might just end up in the business world, maybe as president of her own company.

Sarah began.

*To The Family of Lucas DeVitus,*

*I have known Lucas since he was one month old. He and his mother lived across the hall from my wife and me in a second-floor apartment above a small neighborhood grocery store. I had the greatest respect for Anne DeVitus and the way she picked up the pieces of her life and made a good home for herself and her son.*

*After watching Lucas grow from a good kid to a great young man, I was very pleased to be his high school football coach. He didn't have the big, burly build of a typical football player, but he was very strong and wiry. But what his slight build lacked in physical attributes, he compensated for in determination and drive. It was my pleasure to coach him in utilizing his talents to become a good team player and a fine example of sportsmanship. I could always count on him to rally team spirit, encourage his fellow players, and give his very best effort every single time. I'd like to say I had something to do with shaping the*

*fine man he became. (But that would sound prideful on my part, and that's not the reason for this letter)*

*I'm writing to you to say how very sorry I am that Lucas is no longer here with us. He and I still talked often after he became a husband and a father, and I know how centered he was in his beliefs. In fact I would not be enjoying my own ability to connect with a power greater than myself if it had not been for Lucas' consistent example of someone who lived by principle. He was one those people you just looked up to, no matter how many years younger he was than you.*

*I remember one particular incident involving him that changed my own life and revitalized not only my coaching career but also challenged the entire team. I was so caught up in specific skills and measurable metrics that I was missing the talent of individuals who were more valuable to the team for their heart and effort. Many of the players with natural skills simply didn't have what it took to be winners.*

*In one of our daily practices I overheard Lucas make a comment to another player about how those metrics were not translating into success on the field. I overreacted and pulled him aside at the end of the practice to go head-to-head with the captain of the football team as a way of putting him in his place. I remember saying, "Let's see how tough you are now! Let's see if you can beat Joe head-to-head. Best two out of three." At the time Lucas was a third stringer with no shot of ever getting on the field because I was so focused on size and measurable skills and metrics which were measured in practice, not on the actual playing field during a game. I'm ashamed to say that I never even acknowledged his strength and stamina at practice nor did I acknowledge his burning desire to play and win.*

*To my surprise Lucas actually beat Joe three out of three. He just ran right through him. Poor Joe didn't know what hit him. In Joe's defense he probably just assumed Lucas was a pushover since I never gave him any credence. But even if Joe wasn't fully prepared for the first head-to-head hit he knew what he was up against by the third one and Lucas still beat him. That's when the stamina point hit home. Even if Joe was stronger and more skilled than Lucas, by the third round he was exhausted and couldn't handle Lucas' will and stamina. Lucas made his point. He showed me that I was missing some very key metrics: willingness and the conditioning to go the extra mile and a desire and a passion to win. His faithfulness in attendance at practice and the consistent giving of his best effort had not counted with me before, but after he*

*beat Joe, I began to notice him and his desire to be a winner and the never-ending energy he seemed to possess to always give 110% for the entire game.*

*Occasionally I would take the team for Saturday picnics at a field in sight of Two Lights in Cape Elizabeth. At the end of one scrimmage in that field, Lucas called my attention to the fact that even though one of the two lighthouses did not have a working light anymore, it was still standing there, waiting for someone to light it up again. That's what a good coach can do, he said—light up the hearts and minds of his players.*

*This encounter with Lucas and what he shared with me transformed my thinking and the way I saw my players. I began working with my average players who also had a burning desire to win. I began focusing more on getting them into top physical condition to be able to go the extra mile and give 110% effort on every play—all the way through to the end of the game when the opposing team, though possibly more skillful, was no match for the will and the stamina of a fully prepared team. The bottom line is that my team went on to win championships at all levels. My guys proved that heart, guts, and persistence can beat unprepared skill. All because Lucas challenged me.*

*Later in our relationship, Lucas shared with me that one of the lessons he had learned at eight years of age from his former football coach was to be prepared to win by being in great physical condition but also to give a 110% effort every time which showed the heart of a winner. That coach had told his team, "I'd rather have 11 guys with mediocre skills who are in top physical condition are ready to play and are willing and able to give 110% for the entire game than have 11 guys with great skills but no desire nor stamina to work through to the end to win." Lucas had taken to heart everything that coach had said. Their team was known as the mighty ant colony because they were the smallest team in the league. They went undefeated that year and had only one touchdown scored against them the entire year.*

*I will never forget the lesson I learned from Lucas that year. He summed it up so simply in a poem he sent to me. The poem has such a simple message but a few sentences in the accompanying note drove it home for me. It basically said, Coach Richards, your problem is quite simple. You need to get out of your head full of knowledge and become aware of what is right in front of you. Just simply stop and look and listen and you will always know what to do. That was what I loved about Lucas. He had such a frank way of saying things. And though it sometimes caught me off guard, it was that frankness that drove his points home.*

*I will also never forget his passion for helping people. He was truly a wonderful kid who turned into a wonderful adult. I'm proud to have known him.*

*If I can ever do anything to help you and your children, please pick up the phone and call me. I would do anything for Lucas.*

*Sincerely,*

*Tom Richards*

“I remember when Dad talked to me about hanging in there and giving extra effort,” Daniel contributed as soon as Sarah stopped reading.

“I do, too,” Sarah added, as she fumbled through the envelope obviously looking for something missing. “Here it is. He said if you always gave more than is expected of you, you always came out a winner.” She continued with a slight tone of disappointment.

“Oh, good,” she said as she pulled a folded piece of paper out of the envelope. “I was worried that he didn’t include the poem!”

## Stop and Look and Listen

I've heard it said a million times  
But never understood  
The power in these simple words  
Can transform bad to good.

As children we would be implored  
To heed this great advice  
Not knowing these three little words  
Were perfect and concise.

It's not a trick or silly game  
That somehow works sometimes.

Its power is a mystery  
A riddle that solves rhymes.

You take each word and point it to  
A problem that you have  
And each one moves you closer to  
The answer, good or bad.

For when you STOP you still the mind  
To clear out all the clutter  
Removing all the stuff inside  
That causes all the mutter.

And then you LOOK because you see  
Where once the noise concealed,  
The situation's clear to you.  
Now truth can be revealed.

But now the trick is letting go  
To what you see is right  
To LISTEN to the answers that  
This troika brings to light.

Your problems all can be resolved  
As simple as can be  
By following the steps above—  
The simple one, two, three.

So when you're faced with troubles  
And you know that something's missing  
Remember these three simple words:  
STOP and LOOK and LISTEN

As Sarah concluded she added, “This was Dad’s simple message. He used to always say to me when I was frustrated, get out of your head or you’ll never be able to see the answer.”

“Yeah, he used to dope-slap me to make that point” Daniel added, as they both started to laugh.

Sharon looked at her two children and saw Lucas in their features and in their personalities. She saw him in their attitudes and their newborn spirit of awareness. And she was suddenly flooded with gratitude for the man she had married and loved for so many years. She was also suddenly overwhelmed with the desire to tell him these things herself. But that was not possible because he was gone and it filled her with sadness.

When she looked up she saw Daniel and Sarah looking at her intently.

“Mom, are you alright?” Sarah asked.

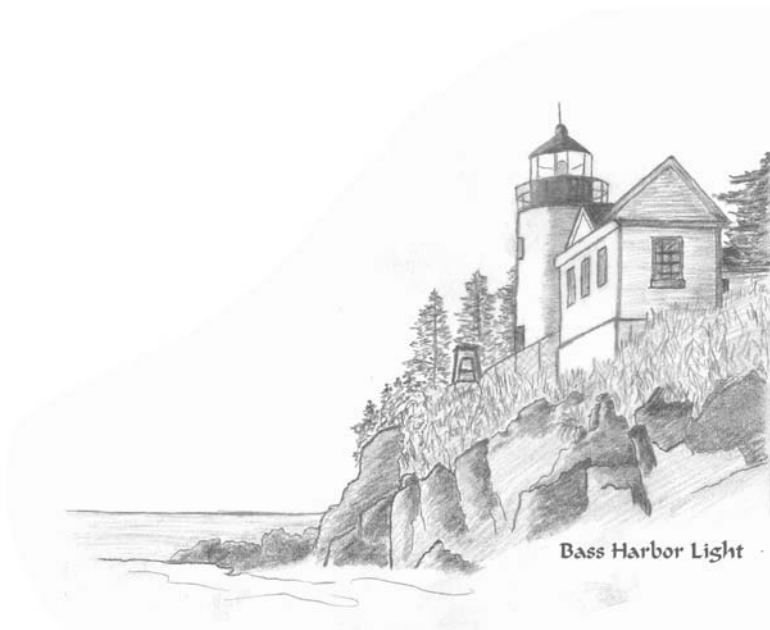
“Yeah, Mom. You look a little funny,” Daniel agreed.

“Yes, I’m okay,” Sharon answered, swallowing her grief yet one more time. “I was just missing your father,” she explained. “I guess that will be happening from time to time and you’ll both just have to understand and let me deal with it when it happens. But having you around makes it easier for me to cope.” She reached out and touched each of them.

“It’s okay,” Sarah said as she patted her mother’s arm. Daniel nodded as he squeezed Sharon’s hand. “We do understand,” he said. “We miss him, too.”

Sharon couldn’t help smiling at her two wonderful kids who reminded her so much of Lucas, as tears of gratitude found their way down her cheeks.





Bass Harbor Light

# TWELVE

*We're all born into a crazy world...*

There were two letters left and Daniel was anxious to get started. "I'm reading today," he said, as he looked intently at the almost empty bowl. "Give me a chance to get breakfast on the table," Sharon replied with a laugh.

"No need!" came a response from the other room, as Sarah came bursting through the door with juice, coffee, and bagels from their favorite breakfast shop down the road.

"Oh! Well that makes it easy," Sharon exclaimed as she happily removed her apron and took a seat at the table.

"Well, read on" Sarah said to Daniel as she passed the coffee to her mother and pushed the bowl closer to him.

"Which one should I pick" he said. "This one" Sarah said as she reached into the bowl and picked the one off the top and handed it to him.

"Thanks." Daniel said, as he reached into the bowl and purposely took the one she didn't choose.

"Oh, stop it you two" Sharon said as she began to realize that a bit of normalcy was beginning to return to the household. They both smirked at each other as Daniel opened the letter and began to read.

*To the Family of Lucas DeVitus,*

*I'm so sorry for your loss. My name is Michael Sparks and I met Lucas several years ago at Bass Harbor Light on Mount Desert Island at a time when I was in desperate need of love and compassion. I know you don't know me and probably never heard of me but Lucas was like a father to me — the father I wished I had when I was a young man. He has meant so much*

*to me and my sanity that I felt compelled to write this letter to tell you what he did for me.*

*First I should tell you that I am a gay man. I tell you this so you will understand the story as I tell it. I was like every other gay man, I guess, growing up confused about my feelings and never really finding anyone who could understand or who would be willing to just listen to me without passing judgment. But as the years went by I started to meet people like me and realized that I wasn't as alone as I thought I was. When I finally got up the courage to tell my parents, they were devastated and didn't know how to deal with it. My mother tried to accept it but I know she never really did and my father just shut down and refused to acknowledge it. At one point he brought a priest home to speak to me but he only succeeded in making me hate God and the church.*

*At 18 I finally left home and put the guilt and confusion behind me so I could pursue my life as I saw fit. Like most people I had many false starts with relationships on my way to finding true love but one day I met the man of my dreams and we became lovers and best friends. Shortly after we met we moved in together to pursue life as we believed it was meant to be for us. We did everything together and (despite what people thought), we moved through life with the expectation that we deserved to be treated no differently than any other couple who loved and cared for each other. Everything seemed perfect, until one day Joshua came home and told me he had found another man and was moving out. I was completely devastated.*

*I spent days going through waves of emotions, cursing God for having destroyed my life. My mind kept racing from one thought to the next, looking for a reason and looking for someone to blame. I had no one to turn to. All I could see was my mother looking at me with lost eyes and no answers and my father looking at me with judgment and embarrassment. On a dark Sunday morning at 5:00 A.M. after a night of running from my thoughts, I couldn't take it anymore and I ran out of my house with the thought of killing myself.*

*I ran to a place that as a teenager I had once considered jumping from before I had accepted myself for who I was. It was the lighthouse at Bass Harbor. As I was running towards the lighthouse hoping to get there before I changed my mind, I tripped and fell hard on my face. When my face hit the ground, I began to cry and I remember crying out in tears, "Someone, please help me!" And as soon as the words came out of my mouth someone grabbed my arm and helped me to my feet. It was Lucas.*

*He picked me up looked me straight in the eyes and said, "My God, I am so sorry! I was sitting on the bench with my feet extended into the path. I really didn't expect anyone to be coming by at this hour." He helped me to the*

bench and pulled a napkin from his jacket to wipe the blood from my face. He looked me in the eye and said, "Are you okay?" It took me a few minutes to respond because I was in what seemed like an altered state. I don't know how to explain it but in that moment it felt like Lucas was put there to save me. As soon as his hand grabbed my arm my entire body felt numb and my mind stopped racing.

When my voice returned I said, "Yes, I'm okay. Thank you. Thank you for stopping me."

Lucas said in a confused tone, "For stopping you from what?"

At that point I confessed my intentions to kill myself and as he gripped my arm I confessed my entire life to him and how I had come to this point. Lucas just listened and when I said that I hated God for making my life what it was, he just looked at me and said, "I understand. How could anyone love a god who seems to have abandoned him?"

I responded, "Do you believe in God?"

He replied, "I believe in a loving God, one who never turns away from those who reach out. No matter who they are."

"So your god doesn't care if I'm gay?" I asked.

"God loves all of his children and he seeks to make each of them whole before his or her time is due."

"What does that mean?" I said.

"Each one of us is molded by our environment from the day we are born and, believe it or not, before we even come out of the womb. There are influences seen and unseen that act upon the psyche continuously programming into our minds who and what we will be. As little children we don't have much influence over what gets in there. For instance let me ask you when you first realized that you were gay."

"I can almost remember the exact day," I said. "I was in sixth grade and I remember being attracted to a boy named Paul in my class."

Lucas then asked, "Do you think being gay is genetic?" I immediately said yes.

He nodded and then asked, "Do you think being attracted to tall blondes is genetic?"

That question stopped me in my tracks. Part of me was angry for a moment because I thought Lucas was going to try to convince me that I was not gay. But one look in his eyes revealed no judgment there at all.

He then said to me, "You don't need to answer me. You need to answer you. You need to consider things beyond what you have limited yourself to think as you tried to define yourself throughout your life. You are a human being who, like all of us, was born into a crazy world in which you had no control over what was entering your mind on a daily basis. From the day you were born and even before you came out of the womb, your mind and body absorbed sounds, images, and chemicals which influenced all of your likes and dislikes. This is why when Christ was being tortured on the cross he said, 'Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.'

"Whether being gay is right or wrong isn't for anyone else to answer but you. If it is wrong it's not your fault. You are forgiven for anything you did not willfully or intentionally create in your life. And if it isn't wrong, you have nothing to worry about. And the good news is that you don't have to believe in Jesus Christ or God to believe what I just said.

"It is easy to see that each of us is born into a crazy world. In religious parlance that's what they mean when they say we are born in sin. None of us had any way of stopping the foolishness that went on around us. None of us can remember all of the mini-traumas our minds were exposed to as we grew up. None of us could have controlled what our mothers were going through emotionally; thereby causing chemical reactions in her body that also entered into our bloodstreams. All we could do is compensate or block memories in order to deal with it. One day we wake up to think that we like or dislike something, but the truth is that our minds have been programmed by years of input that we had little control over. Just like a "crack" baby who obviously doesn't choose to be addicted to crack.

"People think they fall in love, but the truth is that you can only rise in love. It is lust, a selfish desire to satisfy ourselves (not who we supposedly love) that we "fall" in.

"True love has nothing to do with desire and physical attraction. True love is not selfish. It doesn't seek to control or manipulate. True love has nothing to do with sex. I am not going to tell you that your physical attraction to another man is right or wrong. That is not my place. But I will tell you to seek the truth. Go within. Sit still and watch your thoughts. Don't try to run from them, no matter how bad some of them may seem. Cry if you feel like crying but not because you feel sorry for yourself; cry because you've let these thoughts rule your life. Watch them and wonder. Where did they come from? Most of these thoughts are not yours. They are images that were implanted over years of exposure to your world. Let them wash over you, and then let them go. If they are truly your thoughts they will come back; if not, you are free from

*their influence. From now on let a power and intelligence greater than yours reprogram your mind from within.”*

*When he finished, I was stunned. I can't tell you that I'm not gay anymore nor that I've come to realize that it is wrong to be gay, but what I can tell you is that Lucas saved my life and my sanity. He treated me like a loving father should treat his son as I so desperately wanted my father to treat me at a time in my life when I needed it most. Since meeting him that day and following his advice, many of my problems have simply gone away. I no longer feel that I need to prove anything to anyone. It's a strange feeling. It's actually a non-feeling. I don't seem to be physically attracted to anyone in particular lately, though there are people (both men and women) that I connect with spiritually—many of whom I can say I love dearly. For the first time in my life I can say I'm truly happy just to be. Lucas sent me the most beautiful poem I've ever read that helped me to understand how to simply be. You may have already seen it but I've enclosed just in case.*

*If there is anything I can do to help ease your pain in this time of need (as Lucas eased mine), please contact me at the number on my enclosed card.*

*God bless you all. (That is something I never imagined I would ever say),  
Michael Sparks*

“Here's the poem,” Daniel said, with a look of being overwhelmed and a touch of sadness on his face. “It's called *To Be or Not To Be*.”

## To Be or Not to Be

Life seems such a struggle  
As you go from day to day.  
You wake to seek new answers  
But you never find your way.

You know you haven't made it  
And you see you must go on.  
But it seems for all your trying  
The conclusion is forgone.

Your mind spins in a circle  
As you try to see the light.  
But the strange thing is that trying  
Seems to keep things out of sight.

This struggle seems to go on  
Like there'll never be an end.  
But it's hope that keeps you going  
Though it's hard to comprehend

That life is full of meaning  
And that you must stick it out.  
For what else could life be for?  
But some use there is no doubt.

So when you see that life's a stage  
On which you play a role,  
In your drama you must journey  
To complete your body's soul.

But if this world's a theater  
Where we have no real command,  
Then how does one move through it  
In a space that's all been planned?

I guess that all a player does  
When given his part's script  
Is to play the role he's given  
And to adlib when he's slipped.

So go and play your role now  
That you've been born to play

And do the things you need to  
As your life unfolds today.

For doing more within the scene  
That you are in right now  
Will halt your movie's progress  
Which Direction won't allow.

So play the part in which you're cast  
And soon you'll surely see  
That life is just a journey  
For you to be or not to be.

As soon as he read the last line Daniel dropped the poem and quickly walked out of the room, turning his face away. Stunned, neither Sharon nor Sarah knew what to say.

"What do you think is the matter?" Sarah asked with an uneasy look on her face as she noticed her mother looking a bit the same. Neither one of them wanted to venture a guess at why Daniel reacted the way he did.

"Why don't you clean up while I go talk to your brother?" Sharon said as she pushed away from the table and headed towards the stairs.

"Okay," Sarah responded. "I hope everything's alright with him."

"I'm sure he'll be fine," Sharon said as she headed upstairs to Daniel's bedroom.

Sharon knocked on Daniel's door. "Leave me alone..." was the muttered response.

"Are you alright?" she said, hoping that whatever it was had passed and Daniel would dismiss it with a trivial excuse.

"I'm fine, Mom," Daniel said in a quiet voice as he turned his head away obviously wiping tears from his eyes. "Do you want to talk about it?" Sharon said hesitantly.

“It’s just that Dad.... I don’t know. I’m just embarrassed, proud, and sad—all at the same time. I can’t explain it. Something about that letter overwhelmed me. I feel weird even saying it. How could Dad be so connected to people with no judgment of them? I’m embarrassed because I know I have judged all kinds of people. I’m proud because that was my father that man was talking about in his letter. And I’m sad because one of the greatest people in the world is not here anymore and I don’t know if I can ever be like him.”

“Daniel, don’t you worry about being like your father,” Sharon said as she patted his arm. “You just need to be you. And that is what your father would tell you. It sounds to me that you learned a great lesson here today. I think we all did. It is not our place to judge others. We can never know what other people have gone through in their lives that has made them who they are today. We can only treat each person we meet with respect by treating them the way we would hope they would treat us.”

“The golden rule,” Daniel said. “I guess it is.” Sharon hugged her son and said, “Now go be you and do whatever it is that you are supposed to be doing today.” They both laughed as Sharon left the room and Daniel began searching for a certain shirt his dad had given him last Christmas. He wanted to wear that today and feel close to Lucas.





Wood Island Light

# THIRTEEN

*The purpose of forgiveness is to set yourself free...*

It was day 11 of the breakfast marathon for the DeVitus family. Today was the day they would read the last letter and they were back inside at the dining room table which had been set once again with the china and crystal. Since it was a special day, they had voted to have as elegant a breakfast as they were capable of pulling together. They started with pomegranate-cranberry juice in wine glasses and poached pears with cream and white chocolate scones warm from the oven. Then came the cheddar and spinach quiche with breakfast kabobs of maraschino cherries, pineapple chunks, mandarin orange slices and sausage balls on short skewers. Sharon set the carafe full of hot coffee on the table and stood back to admire the beautiful meal the three of them had accomplished together.

*There isn't anything we can't do if we stick together while we go through this*, she thought with pride in her children and love in her eyes for the husband and father who was no longer with them. *I'm sure he's looking down at this and remembering what good times we had at this table*, she hoped as she brushed away a tear threatening to work its way down her cheek.

Now was not the time to cry. Now was the time to celebrate that they had survived the two weeks since Lucas had died. Now was the time to look to the future and make some plans together. Throughout the days since Lucas had died, they had come up with several ideas of things they could do to help others as Lucas had done for so many people. It had come so naturally to him that she doubted he had even realized what he was doing or the effect he had on people's lives. *I wish he could have heard the ten letters we've read so far*, she thought. *They would have made him so happy.*

Today they would decide what, if anything, they were going to do about these letters and the lessons they contained. Was there something they were supposed to do with it all?

*Please, God, show us what to do!* Sharon breathed the prayer softly into the empty room. To her surprise, she heard an answer. Not audibly, but in her head she clearly heard a voice saying, “Don’t worry. You’ll know when the time is right.”

“Wow, Mom! Where are we? In New York City?” Daniel let out a low whistle as he entered the room.

“No, we’re at the Harraseeket Inn in Freeport, of course,” Sarah answered before Sharon could formulate a retort for her son.

“Okay, you two. I’m the mom and I say let’s sit down and enjoy all this before it gets cold.” Sharon moved to her place and Daniel surprised her by pulling out her chair for her and then pushing it in as she sat down. He looked over at Sarah who was getting ready to pull out her own chair and stopped her with a raised hand.

“If you’ll wait for me to get over there, I’ll help you,” he offered. Sarah was so surprised she stood still until he got to her side and pulled the chair out for her. Then instead of pushing it in for her as she expected, he left her in a half-sitting position and walked over to his own place and sat down. He grinned childishly at her. All she could do was laugh while she seated herself. Sometimes Daniel could be a bit goofy.

When they had finished breakfast, Daniel went to the buffet table and moved the crystal punch bowl to a place in front of Sarah. It was her turn to read and there was one last letter in the bowl. She took it in her hand but instead of opening it immediately, she looked at Sharon and Daniel in turn.

“It’s hard to believe we’ve learned so much about Dad through these letters,” she reflected. “It’s also hard to believe that he helped so many people.”

Daniel spoke up, serious for once. “Before Dad died I never thought much about other people’s problems. But I’m glad he wasn’t like me. I knew he was a nice guy, but I didn’t know just how nice he was.”

“He really was the best,” Sarah said, as she choked back tears.

Ignoring the lump in her throat, Sharon joined in.

“Yes, he really was something special. That’s why I married him and that’s why we have two of the most wonderful kids in the world. You two really are something too, you know?”

“Who? Us?” both kids said in unison, and then they all started to laugh. But Sarah had a destination in mind so she picked up her train of thought after the laughter died down.

“I think we got these letters for a reason, don’t you? Isn’t it just a bit too weird that all these people took the time to write these wonderful stories of how Dad helped them and that they made the effort to come to the funeral and then to the graveside service so they could hand them to us personally? What does that tell you?” Both Daniel and Sharon were quiet for a moment before Sarah continued.

“I have an idea, but I’m not going to share it until after we read today’s letter. I don’t know who wrote it or what’s in it, but I think I’ll know after I hear it whether my idea is the right one or not. Shall I start reading now? Are you both ready?”

As Daniel and Sharon nodded, Sarah began to read letter number 11.

*Dear Mrs. DeVitus and Children,*

*I’m so sorry for your loss. Lucas was like a father to me but he was actually my savior. I can say with absolute certainty that I would not be alive today if it wasn’t for him.*

*Let me warn you before I go on. This letter may be difficult to read at points but I felt it was important for you to know the whole story so please be prepared as you continue. I’ll start with a little background.*

*My name is Wanda Turcotte, but everyone has called me WT since I was a very young child. Though WT are my initials some kids in the poor neighborhood where I lived began calling me White Trash, which fit the WT nicely as far as they were concerned. In that area of Biddeford almost everyone spoke both French and English. The church was our sanctuary from the reality of our low-income world. There we could feel welcome and wanted. There we could forget how poor we were. There we gained strength to fight our way through the week ahead. One week when I was 14, however, proved to be more than even the church could handle.*

*My mother and my four siblings and I shared a two-room apartment in the inner city. One night we were all asleep when there was a terrible banging on our door. The police were there to take us to foster homes because someone in the neighborhood had told them we were not receiving the care we needed from our mother who worked two jobs to keep us in clothes and provide food. The five of us children were separated from that day on, each of us being sent to a different foster home. I was the oldest and I knew I could make it on my own, so I planned how I would escape. I vowed to take control of my own life. Within a month I had managed to make my way out of the foster home and back to my old neighborhood—30 miles from where I had been sent. I hitchhiked to get there. Everything was the same as it had been before, except now I was alone.*

*I needed a job so I told the manager at the food market that I had just turned 16 and would do anything for a paycheck. He hired me as a bagger. I worked 40 hours a week and brought home 64 dollars every Saturday. School was out of the question. There was no time. I lived in an abandoned house for a while until I could find a one-room efficiency apartment. It was all mine and I loved that place! The rent was 35 dollars a week, including electricity, water and heat—what there was of it. That left me 29 dollars for food, clothes and everything else. I managed to get a false ID for food stamps. After two months of looking over my shoulder expecting the police to find me and send me into another foster home, I began to relax into my new life. But I relaxed too soon.*

*Every Thursday night I worked until the store closed at 10 P.M. Then I walked home by myself. One Thursday night I was so tired I let my guard down and I didn't notice the three men following me. They noticed me, however, and before I could scream I felt a hand go over my mouth clamping it shut so I couldn't even bite the fingers digging into my skin. Someone else pinned my arms behind my back and the third man pulled my feet out from under me and I landed on my back in a dark alley between two old brick houses. I was street-wise enough to know what was going to happen next and I fought as hard as I could but I was not a big girl and they were big men. Just as I knew the moment I dreaded had come, I heard a man yelling from a distance. "Hey! You men let her go! You hear me? LET HER GO!"*

*The man holding my hands behind my back let them go and the man on top of me grabbed my hands and held them over my head. But not before I raked his cheek with my fingernails. I could hear the other man running and by the loudness of his voice I knew he was coming to help me. But then I heard the sounds of a fight and I knew the third man had reached my would-be rescuer and was determined to stop him. I found out later that he was fighting like fury*

*to get to me but the two men held him down while the man who was holding me did whatever he wanted. To this day I cannot make my mind relive the things that happened to me during those few minutes I was pinned to the ground. As I lay there I turned my face enough to focus on the man who had tried to help me and made eye contact with him. During that moment something passed between us. Profound sorrow on his part that he could not reach me in time and forgiveness and gratitude on my part that at least he had tried. I could hear him yelling at the man to stop while he shouted encouragement to me. He kept saying just look at me. Just look into my eyes. I did for as long as I could but I soon passed out from the pain and the fear and I heard no more.*

*The next thing I knew was that I was on an operating table at Southern Maine Medical Center with people all around me yelling at me to wake up. They didn't know my name because my purse had been stolen and I had no ID with me so they just yelled, "Come on, Girl! You can make it! Come on, now. Wake up! WAKE UP!" I woke up. And then I fell back asleep on my way to the room they had prepared for me.*

*I woke up in the early morning and had no idea where I was. Then my brain cleared enough for me to remember what had happened just before I had passed out. I must have groaned because a very nice man got out of the chair beside my bed and stood looking down at me while he took my hand. I just knew that he had been the one who had tried to rescue me the night before. I couldn't forget his eyes. As soon as the attackers had finished with me, they had all run off, and he was able to scoop me off the pavement, carry me to his car several streets away, and drive me to the emergency room. He had sat beside my bed all night, waiting for me to wake up. He told me his name: Lucas DeVitus.*

*I kept falling asleep while he sat with me all that day, but eventually I learned that he was beating up on himself because he had not been able to prevent the men from doing what they set out to do. He couldn't come to my rescue because he was being held face down on the ground by two men much larger than he was. As he tried to break free they just pressed down harder on him, one of them forcing a knee into his face to make sure he would see all the horrible things that were being done to me. After the man finished with me he ran back to his friends thinking that he would let one of them have their way with me now but when they loosened their hold on Lucas he freed himself and got to his feet. When he tried to make a dash for me, one of the men slashed at him and punched him, but Lucas was quick and the blade only tore his shirt sleeve and didn't cut him. At this point some other people passing the alley had stopped to see what was going on. Luckily this scared the men off and Lucas was able to help me.*

“I remember that shirt!” Sharon gasped. “I asked him what had happened and he told me he got too close to a sharp instrument. He made it out to be a little thing of no consequence! I can’t believe he kept this story from me.”

“He probably didn’t want to scare you,” Daniel said. “Keep reading, Sarah.”

*Lucas spent that day with me as I faded in and out of oblivion. When he knew for sure that I was out of danger, he finally headed home, but not before he left his contact information with the patient services department. He asked them to call him if I needed anything or if I developed complications. He did for me what the Good Samaritan did for the injured man in the Bible. Even in my medication-induced stupor, I thought Lucas was wonderful. I still do.*

*You see, his goodness and caring spirit didn’t stop when he walked out of the hospital that day. I was there for two weeks, and Lucas either visited or called me every day. (There were more calls than visits because he had to travel for his work, as you well know.) The worst day for me was the day they removed the bandages to reveal the knife wounds to my face and chest. I think I screamed for an entire hour until they could sedate me enough to shut me up. I was absolutely horrified at what had happened to me and absolutely frightened to death to think about going back to my apartment and my job. If it hadn’t been for Lucas’ encouraging phone calls and visits, I really think I might have tried suicide. Before the knifing, I had not been beautiful by anyone’s measure. But now... Now I was grotesque in my own eyes. I nearly lost it that day, but Lucas was there with me and he kept encouraging me to hang on, that I wasn’t alone, and that I would get through this with God’s help. I was so devastated that I answered him bitterly through my tears, “And where was God when this was being done to me?” He didn’t answer me. He just bowed his head and cried with me. And that touched me more than anything he could have said.*

*That an absolute stranger could have done so much to help me and had shown such compassion to me did just as much for me emotionally as the doctors did for me physically. After a month of excellent medical attention and deep emotional healing counseling from the staff psychiatrist, I was released. But I had nowhere to go. My apartment had been rented to someone else when I had not been there to pay the rent for two consecutive weeks. My job had been given to someone else as well. I had nothing but some clothes the social worker had purchased for me at the local consignment shop. And I had one friend who had*

*given me his phone number. I called Lucas from the hospital's information desk because I had no way to pay for the call.*

*To make a long story short, your Lucas helped me find a job in the same consignment shop where the hospital had purchased the clothes I wore. He had already rented a room for me at a local boarding house and had paid the first month's rent himself. He had stocked the refrigerator with food. He just seemed to know what I would need and he did it all without being asked.*

*As I regained my self-confidence and became a normal everyday working girl, my facial and chest scars also began to heal. I knew I was hard to look at with the six bright ugly welts causing everyone to look anywhere but at me as I waited on them at the shop. Makeup helped a bit and the owner of the store was wonderful to me. She was always building me up in my spirit and encouraging me to look forward to the day when the scars would hardly be noticeable. Even the hospital social worker came to see me at the shop and told me they might be able to do some reconstructive surgery to minimize the scars at very little cost to me. Maybe even at no cost. I thanked her and said I wasn't ready to go under any kind of knife anytime soon, even if it was a scalpel in a plastic surgeon's hand.*

*I was so bitter that I chose to live with my scars plainly visible rather than take a chance on what might happen if the reconstructive surgery failed. I had seen pictures in the hospital and I could not bring myself to go through the process that might or might not make my appearance more acceptable to the public. Since when had I ever been acceptable to the public anyway?*

*Eventually even Lucas stopped talking to me about the possibilities and just focused on encouraging me every time he could. He was not in the Biddeford area often, but whenever he knew he had an insurance claim to investigate, he would call me at the shop and he would either take me to lunch or for a picnic dinner after work at one of his favorite spots: Biddeford Pool with its lovely view of Wood Island Light. He'd buy the meal and I would help him eat it. I had begun wearing hats with veils every time I went out in public. But with Lucas I didn't need a veil to hide my hideous scars. He accepted me as I am. That was the single-most important thing anyone has ever done for me and I will be eternally grateful.*

*Eventually I got my life back on track. I now own the consignment shop, purchased when my employer retired and made me a deal I couldn't refuse. I have a very small two-bedroom ranch on a cul-de-sac in Saco and I seem to be content living there.*

*Over the past fourteen years Lucas became a dear friend, but there was never any more than friendship between us. He was like an older brother to*

*me and I miss him, just knowing he is gone. I cannot begin to imagine what it is like for you as you try to move on without his daily presence in your lives. Lucas talked to me a great deal about spiritual things, so I know that we will all see him again someday. That thought gives me great comfort, as I hope it does for the three of you.*

*If I can ever do anything for you, please do call me. My card is inside this envelope. It would be my pleasure to talk with you about the wonderful man who helped me so much when no one else did. Please know that you are being remembered in my prayers.*

*With gratitude,*

*Wanda Turcotte (WT)*

No one said anything for several minutes as Sarah folded up the letter and put it back into the envelope and added it to the pile on the buffet table. When she returned to her seat, Sharon looked up from her plate and whispered, "I had no idea he had done that. Why didn't he tell me? Maybe I could have helped, too!"

"Maybe we can all help," Sarah thoughtfully replied. Reading WT's letter had profoundly touched all three of them. Even Daniel was lost in thought over what he had heard. Then he picked up Sarah's challenge.

"We need to talk about what we've learned about Dad and then we need to talk about what we're going to do to follow in his footsteps. We are his family and it seems to me that we owe that to him."

Sharon was momentarily taken aback by her son's intuitive outburst. Where did he get such wisdom at sixteen? Well, he was his father's son, after all. That explained it.

"Good idea, Daniel," she offered.

Then Sarah chimed in "But which one of us could possibly write such beautiful poems? How would we do it? It seems like those poems were a special gift only Dad had."

Sharon answered, "The poems were your father's gift but that doesn't mean we can't find our own special way to help. Let's all think about this overnight and have breakfast together again tomorrow. We can talk about it then."





# FOURTEEN

*Be careful, because sometimes it **is** too late...*

As Sharon and Sarah rose to begin clearing the table, Daniel said quietly, "Wait a minute. We're not finished yet." He drew a white envelope from his pocket and placed it on the table. On the front was just one word, *Daniel*, in large scrawled handwriting.

"What's that?" Sarah asked as she sat down again. Sharon said nothing but also returned to her seat.

"On the day of Dad's funeral the driver of our limo handed this to me and told me to open it when I was ready. I had forgotten about it until this morning," Daniel said as he squared his shoulders and raised his eyes to look at his sister and mother. "And I think I'm the one who has to read it," he added. "I have a feeling this is not going to be easy reading, but I don't know why I feel that way."

The two women agreed and he opened the envelope, unfolded the six pages handwritten in a large scrawl, took a deep breath and began.

*Hello, Son.*

*I have waited forty-six years to say that. I've never called anyone son before.*

*I know a statement like that needs to be explained, so here goes. I'm no writer, but I feel so strongly that it's time to make explanations for something that happened when your father was just a few days old. I don't know if I can make up for the mistakes I made back then, but I am going to try. I ask that you listen to what I am going to say and try to keep an open mind. A lot of time has gone by, so I'll bet you're going to wonder why it took*

*me so long to reach out to all of you. Sometimes I have asked myself that same question. When I learned that your dad had died I asked my boss to assign me to drive the limo for your family on the day of the funeral. I knew it was time to ask you and your mom and sister to forgive me. I just wish I hadn't waited until it was too late to reach Lucas. But that can't be changed and I'll have to live with that for the rest of my life. It took me awhile to build up the nerve to ask my boss but I knew driving you that day was a way to be close to you without revealing who I am.*

*I also knew that when I picked you up at your home to drive you to the church that day, it was going to be the hardest thing in the world for me to not spill my guts to you right then. I imagined you would look so much like your father that it would take my breath away. I had been following Lucas' life for years, you see, but I had not made myself known to him. Even though I was sometimes in the same place as he was, I didn't approach him. (The reasons will become clear as you read on.) I was so full of guilt that I didn't know what I could say to him even if I ever did find myself looking him in the eye.*

*Guilt is a very bad thing, Daniel. It eats away at your insides, both physically and emotionally. I have the health problems to prove it. When I asked to drive you and your family to the funeral that day, my boss didn't ask me why I wanted that job; he just nodded his head that he would let me do it. I guess having cancer sometimes gets you what you want. Maybe there is a good side to something so bad.*

*Why was I feeling guilty? The same reason I'm feeling guilty right now. I never told anyone the terrible thing I did all those years ago. It's time for me to tell someone, and I'm telling you. I walked out on my son and wife when our baby was just a few days old. I didn't want the responsibility of a son and all that goes with raising a child. I didn't want a wife who might get ill and need taking care of someday. I didn't want to have to provide for two other human beings. I felt trapped and I wanted my freedom. I know it's not a good reason for what I did and I agree that I should have been punished for abandoning my family. Believe me, I HAVE been punished. There is no punishment like carrying around a heavy load of guilt and shame for 46 years.*

*In case you haven't figured it out yet, Lucas DeVitus was my son. Your Grandmother, Anne, was my wife and that would make me your grandfather, if you would allow me to be called that.*

Around the DeVitus family table, the reaction to this revelation was immediate. Daniel threw down the letter he was holding as if it had burned him and just stared at it, unblinking.

Sarah pushed her chair away from the table and began pacing the floor. Sharon put her head in her hands and began to cry softly. For several minutes they were wrapped in their own personal grief, oblivious to the others in the room. Eventually they pulled themselves together and Daniel picked up the letter once again and continued.

*I walked out on them when they needed me the most. I am the scum of the earth for doing what I did, and I have paid a heavy price over the years. But that is nothing compared to what my son and wife went through because of my selfish actions.*

*I hope you are still reading this and have not thrown it in the trash, because I have more I want to tell you. There is more you need to know about Lucas and only I can tell you these things because I'm the only one who knows about them. Things like the time he saved my life.*

Daniel put the letter down for a minute and looked up at Sharon and Sarah. "Can you believe all this?" he asked with amazement. "I remember thinking that limo driver had something familiar about him, as if I knew him somehow."

Sharon nodded and replied, "I wasn't thinking clearly that day, but I did think it was strange that you chose to sit in the front seat with him instead of in the back seat with us on the way home from the cemetery."

Sarah added, "I noticed that, too. What made you do that?"

"I don't know," Daniel reflected. "It just seemed right somehow. I can't explain why I did it."

"Family connections are strange," Sharon guessed as she handed Sarah another tissue. "Keep reading the letter. We have to know what happened next." Daniel obliged.

*Even though I wanted my freedom from responsibility and I got it by leaving them, I guess there was a tiny spark of curiosity buried in my heart to know about my son because from time to time he would pop into my mind and I wondered if he looked like me and what sports he liked.*

*At first I got as far away from Maine as I could by going to work for an international shipping company. They put me on a freighter bound for South America where I worked as a general deckhand. I didn't really care what I did or where I did it. I just wanted to be as far away as possible and that job got me there. After fifteen years of traveling around the world on freighters I figured it was safe to come back to the U.S. I had given my name as Martin Joseph when I applied for the job, so I decided to keep it. My real name is Henry Willinger but it's been so long since I used it, it sounds like someone else to me now. I knew my wife would give our son her last name after I left, and that was okay with me. I had no dream of starting a family dynasty. In my mind at that time, fathering Lucas was my biggest mistake. I couldn't have been more wrong.*

*After returning to the states as Martin Joseph, I got a job in Los Angeles doing the same kind of work for the same shipping company at their facility there. I was into dating women and seeing how much alcohol I could drink and still carry out my responsibilities. I lived for myself and for the moment and the future be damned. The same for the past. Because who knew how much time I would have on Earth anyway, so why not do whatever I wanted? My only goal in life was to enjoy it. Of course I not only drank a lot, but I also smoked three packs of cigarettes every day. I told myself it went with the type of work I did and no one cared what happened to me anyway. And then something turned my attention to the other side of the coin.*

*The company decided to transfer me to the Boston facility and insisted it was time for me to take a desk job. I have to admit I was not totally unhappy to be going back to New England although the idea of sitting behind a desk after decades at sea was depressing. I had been born in Massachusetts and grown up there, so I accepted the transfer because I was ready for a change of scenery. I had been back in Boston for only a month when it was time for my annual physical. The company had arranged for it and made it a condition of my employment due to my age. So I went, of course. A week later I got a phone call from my new doctor. There were two questionable spots on my right lung and he wanted to see me right away.*

*I should have known I was asking for trouble with those three packs of cigarettes every day, but I tended to think of myself as living a charmed life. After all, I had survived many near-misses aboard those freighters for all those years. But I went to see the doctor because the company insisted. Two weeks later I was living with a diagnosis of lung cancer. I was treated with chemotherapy and radiation.*

*My recovery went well, but I was in no position to be dating and the only new friends I had made were at the local bars, so I felt a little lonely. I*

*guess I was beginning to evaluate where I was in my life and wondering how much time I had left.*

*One night I was sitting at a bar alone, enjoying the familiarity of the second-hand smoke, and I reached for the abandoned newspaper next to me for something to do. I thought it was the Boston Globe, but to my surprise it was the Portland Press Herald. Portland, Maine, was where I had met and married Anne DeVitus and where we had lived until the day I walked out on her and Lucas.*

*I carried my beer and the paper to a table and sat down to see how things were going in my old stomping grounds. On page 11B I found the continuation of a story I had missed on the front page. It was about a man who had saved a little girl's life by pulling her out of the way when a car she was walking behind began to back up. She was so short the driver couldn't have seen her, but the hero saw what could have happened and saved her from injuries that could have taken her life. The article praised his efforts and the City of Portland presented him with a medal. The article had attracted my attention because the man wearing his medal and a big smile looked a lot like me. And he should have. It was my son, Lucas DeVitus.*

*As I read the article about my son's bravery once again I felt something I hadn't felt in years. I think it was a glimmer of pride, even though I knew I had no right to claim any credit for any good that my son had in him. That certainly came from his mother, not me. I carried the paper home with me that night, but it wasn't the only thing I carried home. I also carried the beginning of the idea of moving back to Portland. Maybe it was the in-my-face cancer battle, maybe it was nostalgia creeping in—who knows? Within two days I had decided to move back to Maine.*

*I gave my employer a two-week notice. He gave me two-weeks' pay, a good letter of reference, and let me go early. He thought it was the cancer thing; I knew it was something else pulling me back to Maine. Something I didn't quite understand myself. I packed my clothes, left my thrift-shop furniture in my apartment in South Boston, and headed north on I-95. I had always traveled light, needing little to keep me going. Everything I owned took up less than half of the bed of my 2002 Ford F-150 pickup.*

*I didn't want to live in Portland where Lucas and Anne lived, so I found a room for rent in Yarmouth, just north of the city. I had no plan in mind. I just thought I'd see how things went. I had no intention of making my presence known to anyone I had known before. With the change in appearance, the weight loss, the wear-and-tear on my face from the years of drinking and smoking and hard work in the sun on the freighters, I hardly resembled the*

*man who had left Portland many years before, slamming the door shut on his family and his responsibilities.*

*Once in the Portland area, I began seeing a new doctor to monitor my recovery from the cancer when a routine test turned up another problem. The chemo and radiation I had gone through for the cancer had depleted my red blood cells to the point where they said I needed a bone marrow transplant. My body was unable to produce the red blood cells I needed. A bone marrow transplant requires a blood-type match, so there is a national registry for bone marrow donors. To my complete surprise, they found a great match. It turned out to be Lucas. I never met him in person, but he wrote out a nice card with a hand written poem inside and gave it to the nurse and asked her to give it to me. He only signed his first name, but when I held that card in my hand, it was like a bolt of lightning running through me. I just knew it was my son, Lucas DeVitus. I knew it. No one at the hospital would break confidentiality, so I couldn't verify it for certain, but I just knew. A few days later my doctor asked me if he could do anything for me and I surprised him by telling him my story and why I wanted verification of the donor's identity. I simply asked him to check and to tell me if I was right. Was my son also my marrow donor? I vowed I would never do anything about it and I wouldn't try to contact Lucas, because I was sure he wouldn't want to hear from me. The Doc got back to me a week later and told me I was correct. We never spoke of it again, and I never did anything about contacting Lucas. But I was totally blown away by the knowledge that the son I had abandoned had literally saved my life. And he didn't even know it.*

*I did see Lucas one day by accident (or maybe by God's grace). I had always been in love with the sea so I would drive up and down the coast on my days off. One day I decided to visit the Transportation Museum in Owl's Head. When I finished I drove to the lighthouse since I was so close to it anyway. I was just standing there on the fringes of a group of tourists from a bus tour looking out at the surf that was really spectacular that windy day when I noticed a man totally involved in a conversation with a couple of people from the tourist group about 50 feet away. I don't know what drew my attention, but the minute I looked at him I had a feeling I should know him. A few seconds later I realized he looked like the pictures I had seen of Lucas in the newspapers. Then he shook hands with the two men and they moved on. The man sat down on a rock on the beach. He opened an old thermos bottle and poured himself a cup of coffee. It was just like the thermos bottle I had carried to work every day before Lucas was born. Something in me confirmed that I was looking at my son. I know it as surely as I know I am writing this letter. I didn't approach him or make myself known. I really wouldn't have*

*known what to say to him anyway. In a couple of minutes he got up and made his way back to the parking area. I never saw him again.*

*That was two years ago and I have kept my vow of confidentiality until today. I did, however, hire a private investigator to learn whatever I could about Lucas. That's how I knew about you, Daniel. My grandson. You who looks so much like your dad it's amazing. I have followed your life as much as possible without intruding, just as I followed my son's life by scouring the newspaper for any mention of his name. I didn't find much, by the way. I'm sure he just went around doing good without looking for any reward. Not a bit like his old man. I'm sure you were cut from the same cloth as your dad and that you are not a bit like me. That is my prayer.*

*I had been driving for the limousine company for only a month when we were contacted to provide the cars for Lucas' funeral. And then I asked my boss if I could drive the family's limo, because I knew it was time to make things right. I wanted to be at my son's funeral more than I've ever wanted anything in my life. It was probably an invasion of privacy for me to do it, but I felt compelled to be there. I hope you can understand, even a little bit.*

*If you are still reading this, I thank you for that. It has been a help to me to be able to tell you all this. I hope you will share this letter with your mother and sister, and I'd like to apologize to all three of you for the poor choices I made when Lucas was born. His mother did an unbelievable job of raising him alone and I am amazed. I grossly underestimated her character and determination.*

*Before I end this letter that has turned out longer than I thought it would, I'd like to ask you to forgive me. I'm sorry I walked out on my son and his mother. I'm sorry I missed his growing up. I'm sorry I had to learn about you and your sister and mother through newspaper clippings. But most of all, I'm sorry that you do not have a grandfather you can respect. I understand that. I don't have a lot of respect for me, either. All I can do is watch you from a distance and pray that you will grow into just as wonderful a man as Lucas did. Lucas. The son I refused to know. The greatest loss of my life.*

*Your grandfather,*

*Henry Willinger a.k.a. Martin Joseph*

*P.S. There's one more thing. The poem I had mentioned that Lucas included in the card that he left for me at the hospital ripped right through my core. It was as if he knew who I was and was reaching out to tell me it was time to come home. Here is what he wrote in the card:*

Hello,

*I don't know you but in a strange way I feel like I am a part of you now. I have a poem I want to give to you which may help with your recovery. I am no doctor but I do know that the immune system struggles to heal a person from within if they do not release themselves from the mental stresses in their lives. In speaking with one of your nurses I had asked how you were doing and she said you seemed to be recovering okay physically but that there might be an emotional blockage to your healing. She didn't give me too many details but she said you had been worried about some unfinished business in life and that you were struggling with how and when you should make amends for some past mistakes. I don't know what those mistakes are but I do know that forgiveness is just a teardrop away. I also know that for you to heal completely you need to find a way to resolve these things in your mind. This will relieve the mental stress that manifests as harmful chemicals in the body that interfere with your immune system. There isn't a person alive who doesn't make mistakes. You are forgiven as soon as you feel the remorse in your heart and mind and ask for forgiveness. For your own sake, and the sake of those you may have harmed—please don't wait.*

Lucas

*Daniel, it is the last stanza of the poem that is haunting me now that it is too late to make amends with Lucas. This letter is my attempt at following the advice of another line in the poem by reaching out to you. I only hope you and your mother and sister will give me a chance one day to fulfill what I believe your dad's intention was for the poem.*

## Don't Wait

Go say the things  
You need to say  
To those you love the most.

Don't wait for when  
The time is right  
Or when there is a toast.

You'll never know  
When time will end  
Or when you'll wish you'd said

"I love you" to  
The ones you love.  
Don't wait to break the bread,

For life is short  
And bittersweet  
And meant for us to learn

That love is all  
There is to give  
And love is all we yearn.

So go right now  
And make the call  
Or turn to who you see

And tell them that  
You love them so.  
And surely you'll agree

That waiting makes  
You miss the smile  
And miss the little things

That loved ones have  
Inside their hearts  
That waiting never brings.

So do it now  
Because you can  
And set the record straight.

For those you love  
May not be here  
When next you read *Don't Wait*.

Daniel looked up at his sister and mother who were both wiping tears away from their eyes with the used napkins left on the table from breakfast. “Maybe there *is* a good side to something so bad,” he thought out loud.

“Like what?” Sarah asked while blowing her nose.

“Like getting to know our grandfather. What do you think, Mom?”

Sharon continued to mop her eyes while she asked, “Are you sure you want to do this, Daniel?”

“What would Dad do in a situation like this?” he responded.

There was silence for only a few seconds. Then Sarah said, “I believe he would have gone in search of his father and that he would have forgiven him.”

“I think so, too,” Daniel nodded his head. “And the message in the poem that he gave to Henry makes it clear. He’s telling him not to wait to let his loved ones know how he feels. It’s too late for him to tell Dad but I think Dad wants him to tell us. So that’s what I’d like to do. I’d like to give Henry a chance to make things right. Are you two with me on this, or not?” That was a phrase Lucas had used at many a family council meeting over the years.

“Sharon smiled at her son’s maturity and said, “I am so proud of you, Daniel! Your father would be proud of you, too. Why should we withhold forgiveness from Henry when God forgives us for our mistakes? Who are we to point fingers? So, yes. I am with you on this.” Both Sharon and Daniel turned to Sarah.

“Part of me wants to say yes to your idea, but part of me wants to kick Henry Willinger’s butt for what he did to Dad and Gram Anne. He deserves it!” She wiped her eyes again. “But what good would it do now? He sounds as if he feels bad enough already. Maybe he has already paid a heavy price for being so self-centered and uncaring for so long. So I guess it’s okay with me. Forgiving him is what Dad would have done. But when I meet that man, he’s going to have some serious explaining to do to *me*, his granddaughter. Lucas DeVitus was *my* dad, too, you know! Not just yours!”

Then Sarah let a small smile begin on her face. Sharon allowed a small chuckle to escape her lips. Daniel looked at both of them and said, “We just got a grandfather in this family! And I’m going to *make* him let me drive that limo!”



# FIFTEEN

*There's no effort in receiving...*

A little later that morning after the children had gone their separate ways and as Sharon was cleaning up the kitchen from their last letter-reading breakfast, she began reflecting on the overwhelming insights she had gained into Lucas' character from people she had never met. *There is a whole side of him I never really understood!* she thought with a pang of regret. *What was it that drove him?* She wondered. *What was it that gave him the ability to reach out to perfect strangers and zoom in on the exact need in their lives?* She had never really resolved whatever it was that had disconnected her from her husband since the early days of their marriage. They had never talked about it, but she knew that he had felt it, too.

Their marriage had been good in every way, though they had had rough spots like any couple. But through it all Sharon had always known that she was well loved by her husband, and she truly loved him in return. Neither one of them had ever looked twice at anyone else. If there had been one recurring problem in the relationship it had been the difference in their attitudes toward money. Lucas usually saw the glass as half-full; Sharon usually saw the glass as half-empty. But they both always agreed that at least they had *half*, and that was something to be happy about. And when it came to the kind of sustaining love that carries a marriage through the rough spots, they had it in spades. Still she regretted that she had not been a little more aware of who Lucas truly was.

After starting the dishwasher Sharon walked into her bedroom and was hit with a wave of nostalgia and a sense of loss. *He'll never sleep here again,* she reflected sadly. *I suppose I should do something about his clothes in the closet.* She sat abruptly on the edge of the bed where Lucas slept and whispered into the silence, *Oh, God! How do I get through this?*

There was no audible voice in the empty room, but Sharon heard it very clearly in her heart, *I'm here with you. You will know.* Startled by the revelation and without realizing it, she began pouring out her heart.

*God, I don't know how to be like Lucas, she began. I can only be me. I just didn't understand how he connected with you. I don't know why. He didn't seem to need to go to church to believe that you existed. It just didn't make any sense to me. Please, God, I need direction. I'm so drained by the sudden death and funeral of Lucas! Please, please help me. Tell me what you want me to do.*

As Sharon sat in silence a feeling of peace came over her. She sat there for what seemed like hours but it was really only a few minutes. As she looked up her eyes were drawn to the drawer of the nightstand where Lucas kept some personal items and books he would read before he went to bed. Something inside her told her to open the drawer. As she rummaged through the normal contents: tissues, scraps of paper and a variety of pens, she noticed a little book with the image of a beautifully wrapped gift on the cover. She had never seen it before but the five words on the cover made her catch her breath as tears came to her eyes: *The Gift by Lucas DeVitus.* Wondering why Lucas had never shown it to her, she opened the book. Each page held only a sentence or two ending with three dots to urge the reader to turn the page. She began to read.

## The Gift

Free is the Gift but few will receive it...



There is a simple Gift which, once received, will set you free for life...



All anyone needs to do is receive it...



It comes with no instructions...



It's not offered on any special occasion...



You don't need to wait for a special moment to open it...



It is the same Gift given freely to everyone...



It is a Gift, which once received, will set you free from all your worries and sickness...



It is offered not because you deserve it...



As a matter of fact most people have been pushing it away, and even when they've gotten glimpses of it they have outright rejected it...



The Gift is somewhat of an enigma in that its simplicity contradicts its amazing power...



Its declaration is such a challenge to most egos that nearly everyone struggles to simply receive it...



It is a simple yet dichotomously complex Truth which cannot be disputed...



The Gift is so simple yet so powerful that you will struggle to accept it...



The statement "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free" mysteriously leads many people away from it because they think they need to figure out what the Truth is...



Seeking the Truth can often cause confusion through too much thinking and analysis of what the Truth actually is...



You simply need to receive the Gift...



People often search their minds for a particular truth to apply to their current situation...



Much analysis causes much confusion...



There is only one Truth and it is the Gift that should be received in each moment...



You must receive it and accept it for its power to work miracles in your life...



It is the Truth that shall set you free from anxiety and stress...



Are you ready to receive the Gift? ...



It's your birthday today should you choose to receive it...



If not today then when...



The Gift waits...



It will always be there, and on the day you choose to receive it, it will surely be your true birthday...



Are you ready for the Gift? ...

~\*~

It will be best if you receive it on your own the first time with no one around...

~\*~

It will actually be more beautiful if you receive it with your eyes closed...

~\*~

It will be more powerful if you receive it in complete silence...

~\*~

You may want to sit down—for the power of the Gift may bring you to your knees...

~\*~

This Gift—this simple Truth—that has the power to set you free in all situations, in all lives, and which shows no favor and is available to people of all races and religions, can be received over and over again in every moment of every day...

~\*~

This Gift, that keeps giving and giving from now through eternity, is a simple realization that can only be received with a pure heart...

~\*~

This Gift cannot be given; it can only be received...

~\*~

You can point someone to where it is but it is up to them to receive it...

~\*~

It is not yours to give but it is yours to share...

~\*~

You can throw it away but it will always be there...

~\*~

Are you ready for the Gift? ...



You are already experiencing the power of the Gift...



It is your resistance to it that blinds you to its power...



It is your stubborn nature that keeps you from allowing its power to manifest in your life...



It is the experience that you were born into that has kept you from willingly accepting the Gift...



The Gift, once received, contains the answer to every question you will ever have and will open up a flow of peace and confidence for you to deal with everyday life with Grace and ease, but you must accept it wholeheartedly for its power to work in your life...



You cannot doubt it...



You cannot question it...



You must receive and accept it; for there is no other choice...



It is the only real choice you have...



You must open your heart and trust in its power—for the Gift comes with a guarantee...



If you accept it and trust in its power you will experience a life of joy and harmony...



You will weather every storm with grace and ease...



You will overcome all adversity and live each moment in pure happiness knowing that you are living on purpose...



Are you ready for the Gift? ...



Here it is...



The Gift

In every moment of every day receive this simple Gift:

*“Be still and know that I am God”* Psalms 46:10



Be still and know that of yourself you can do nothing, but that all things are possible by letting go to a force that is more powerful than you...



Instructions for the Gift

Everyone has heard the expression: “Let Go and Let God”. If you think back over your life you will surely remember a time when, in utter frustration, you finally stopped struggling and something magical happened. This is the power of the Gift. This IS the Gift...



How do you apply this simple Gift? In every moment of every day—before every response to every situation in which you find yourself—be still and know that you do not have the answer but that if you wait a split second before responding, you will receive an

intuitive answer, which will always be the right response, even if it comes in the form of a non-response...



The knowledge that you have accumulated is useless unless guided by God and it cannot be guided by God unless you stop struggling and start receiving. And the only way to receive divine guidance is in stillness. Just the stillness alone for a split second before responding in any situation has the power to transform the moment...



Start every day receiving the Gift before your feet hit the ground, and end every day receiving the Gift before your feet leave the floor. And in between receive the Gift in every split second before every encounter you have...



The Gift is delivered in stillness...



The stillness is the Gift...



The Gift is God...



Let Go and Let God...



Happy Birthday to your eternal soul...



The Beginning...



As Sharon turned the last page of the book, she was overwhelmed by the depth of feelings that washed over her. She

recognized Lucas in the words he chose and in the way he used them. She was totally immersed in her husband's words and the beautiful thoughts they revealed. As she reached the end of *The Gift* she felt as if the bedroom ceiling opened up and the presence of God had entered the room. She grabbed one tissue after another to dry the tears making their way down her cheeks, experiencing an infusion of warmth and light and something else she almost didn't recognize: a quiet peace—a beautiful letting go of the resentment she had unknowingly harbored toward Lucas for having such a personal relationship with God. She had not realized that this unwarranted resentment had not only come between her and Lucas, it had kept her from enjoying the same closeness with God that Lucas had not only enjoyed, but had willingly shared with others who would listen.

As she closed the book and hugged it to her chest it was almost as if she were hugging Lucas again, almost as if he were right there with her, hugging her back and giving her a final goodbye kiss. How could she have so totally missed what had been so vitally important to him? And why had she let it disconnect her from the essence of who her husband had been?



# SIXTEEN

## *A life of light...*

The next morning there was no letter to open, but the family was now in the habit of having breakfast together and they all gravitated to the dining room table around 8 A.M. as they had been doing for the past 12 days. Sarah produced the tentative itinerary for the trip to meet the people who had written to them about how much Lucas had helped them. This breakfast was no major production. Sharon poured herself a cup of coffee, Sarah got a glass, filled it with orange juice and poured cereal into a bowl, adding milk and brown sugar, and Daniel grabbed a can of Coke, opened it and guzzled down a third of it before Sharon could stop him. She just shook her head when she realized what he planned to have for breakfast: coke and cold pizza from the night before. Sarah just laughed when she saw the look on her mother's face and Daniel managed to look innocent and hurt at the same time while emitting a self-righteous "What?" aimed at his mother. Normal breakfast behavior from all three of them had returned.

"We need to plan several things here," Sharon began as they all sat at the table. "First, when are we going to leave and return? Second, should we drive to Nubble Light in York and start there and work our way down the coast to Lubec, or should we drive to Lubec and work our way back to York? Third, who is going to call all the people who wrote to us and ask if and when they could meet us when we are passing through their area?"

Daniel spoke first. "I vote we drive to York and start there. Then we make our way down the coast, stopping along the way to meet with the different letter-writers, and we end up at West Quoddy Head in Lubec. Then we drive home."

"And do what?" asked Sarah. "What do we do after we've met them all? Is that the end of..." she stopped not knowing what she was trying to say. "I don't know, it just seems like Dad had a mission. Do we just let it die?"

“Well, I don’t know if he had a mission as much as he had a purpose” Sharon offered. “I think your father just did what he did because it was who he was.”

“But now we’re getting to something, possibly a mission we can carry out,” Sharon smiled at her kids. “I know you have the beginning of a plan, Sarah, because I’ve seen the way you got quiet after we finished reading a letter from one of these people. I know you’ve been keeping your idea to yourself, but I think now might be a good time to share it with Daniel and me.”

“I do have an idea I’ve been playing around with in my mind,” Sarah admitted. “I’ve been doing some research on the Internet on different foundations and nonprofit organizations and I’m wondering if we should start one to carry on what Dad did in his life.”

“Wow!” Daniel exclaimed. “I really like that idea!” Then his brow furrowed and he asked, “What’s a foundation?”

Both Sharon and Sarah laughed. Sharon explained that a foundation is an organization that exists to help people or promote a cause. “Some examples would be the one Bill and Melinda Gates started, or the Ford Foundation. Foundations either donate funds and support to other organizations, or provide complete funding for their own charitable activities. Sarah, how do you see a foundation as a way of doing what your father did?”

“I don’t know yet,” Sarah shook her head. “I just think we should be doing things like Dad did. You know, finding people who need help and giving them hope. I don’t know how it will all work out yet.”

Sharon was impressed. “You *have* been doing some thinking, haven’t you?”

“I said yesterday morning that I wanted to wait until we had read all the letters, but WT’s letter convinced me. We should be offering hope and help to people who need it. That’s basically what Dad did.”

“But he put feet to it,” Daniel added. “He didn’t just tell them everything would be better and then leave them. He did what he could to follow through, like he did for WT. I just don’t know how we’re going to write those poems.”

Sarah responded back, “I don’t think we could ever do that. Like I said, the poems were Dad’s gift but we can still move forward and help people in our own ways.”

Sharon was so proud of her children. She sat there watching the birth of an idea that could help thousands of people, and those thousands could help more thousands. And on it would go. There certainly would be a lot of work involved, but this family was no stranger to work. And with Lucas as their example, they certainly didn’t lack for inspiration.

That afternoon Sharon sat in front of her computer and made a list of things to do and then e-mailed the list to both Daniel and Sarah:

TO: Daniel and Sarah

RE: The foundation idea we discussed today.

Here are some to-do things I thought of this afternoon and I wanted to share them with you. Please add yours to the list so we can have our questions all ready when we talk to an expert on starting a foundation. (I don’t know about you, but I’m EXCITED!!!)

- Find out more about foundations and how they work.
- Call six foundations and find out what their challenges and triumphs have been.
- Write a statement of purpose.
- Choose a name for the foundation.
- Discuss what part each of us will play.
- Discuss board members and how many needed. (Or are they called directors?)

Conclusion: This is going to be a lot of work, but I think it's the right thing to do and it's going to help a lot of people. Let's see if we can do it!!

Love, Mom

Dinner that night had been planned for weeks. When Lucas had been alive the family had gone on a picnic together once a month. They had voted to continue the tradition. Tonight was the night. Part of Sharon didn't want to go because it would be the first one without Lucas. She gave herself a stern lecture about the fact that there were going to be a lot of firsts over the next year, all of them without Lucas, and she might as well start now to make the adjustment. The kids needed her strength and, the truth was, she needed theirs. Together they'd make the adjustment, difficult though it might be.

By 5:30 everyone was ready to leave. Sharon had made chicken sandwiches and packed the basket with everything they would need. Daniel had just received his driver's license in May, one month after his 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, and he asked if he could drive. Sharon handed him the keys to the car with a touch of parental trepidation and a twinge of sadness at the passage of childhood. With a mischievous smile on her face, Sarah crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. In reality both of the women thought Daniel was a responsible person and would be a safe driver.

Out of the driveway and turning onto Cottage Road, Daniel drove to their favorite picnic area at Portland Head Light. It had been a special place for Lucas as well, ever since the day Father Frank had talked to the West End Reds about everyone's having a purpose for being created.

As Sharon got out of the car she made sure to congratulate Daniel on being a careful driver. He got the point and gave her a big grin. Sarah just groaned. "You wait, girl!" Sharon told her. "Someday that will be you in the driver's seat and Daniel will probably think the same thing about you."

During dinner the family automatically began discussing the idea of a foundation.

“What are we going to call it?” Daniel asked.

“We could call it the Lucas DeVitus Foundation,” Sharon offered.

“Mom!” Sarah interrupted. “I have a better idea.”

“What’s wrong with naming it after your father?” Sharon said, surprised that her daughter would balk at using her father’s name.

“Nothing at all,” Sarah replied, “but this will be better. I’ve been thinking about this all afternoon. I did some research on the Internet. What do you think of calling it the *Light of Life Foundation*? If you translate Dad’s name, that’s what it means. Lucas is *light*. De is *of*. Vitus is *life*. *Light of Life*.”

No one spoke for a moment, then Sharon said, “Sarah, that’s absolutely beautiful! I *love* it!”

Daniel nodded his agreement and said, “That would make people want to know more about it than if it had just a person’s name on it.

“I’ve been thinking this afternoon, too,” Daniel continued, “and I’ve been thinking that maybe we *shouldn’t* take our trip to meet all the people who wrote us letters.”

“Why?” Puzzled, both Sharon and Sarah spoke in the same breath.

“I think maybe those people would like to meet each other. As far as I can figure out, they’ve never all been together in the same place. They were always one-on-one with Dad. Right?”

Both women nodded. Daniel continued.

“So why don’t we have a huge picnic right here at Portland Head Light, invite them all to come, and tell them we have a very special announcement to make in memory of their friend, Lucas? Let them know it’s something that would help many people and we’d like them to be the first to know about it.”

In her heart Sharon wondered if WT would dare to come. She hoped she would. How she wished there was something she could do to make things right for that woman.

It took Sarah about four seconds to shout, “Perfect! I vote yes!”

Sharon didn't hesitate to add her stamp of approval. She simply said "Ditto." True to form, Daniel said, "All in favor?" Three hands shot into the air.

The DeVitus family was alive and functioning very well. *We're going to make it, Lucas!* Sharon thought. *Are you watching your family? We're going to make it. Thank you, God!*

The next day was Saturday and by 9 A.M. everyone was going in a different direction. As Sarah headed down the driveway on her bike, Sharon called after her.

"Don't forget we're going to have a foundation planning meeting after dinner tonight! You'll be here by 7 P.M., right?"

"Right, Mom!" Sarah called back over her shoulder. "I'll be here!"

Daniel was just hanging up the phone from talking with his friend, Justin. "See you at 10, Jus. YES, MOM! I'll be here by seven. See you then!" He was out the door and gone. Sharon just smiled at the complete normalcy of the day. It was comforting. She gathered up her bag, found the car keys at the very bottom (where else?), and went out to the car to drive around the block and pick up her close friend Ginny. They were going out to lunch and then food shopping together. There was only one problem: There was no car in the driveway. She looked up the street and saw the rear bumper disappearing around the corner. She didn't have to guess who was driving. Oh, he had asked permission all right, and she had granted it last night. But she was so unused to having to share the car that it took her by surprise. She sighed and went back into the house and dialed Ginny's number.

"Hi, Ginny," she said when her friend answered. "I forgot I told Daniel he could take the car. Can I ride with you?" Ginny had three teenagers of her own. All she did was laugh and say, "I'll be right over to get you."

While Sharon waited at the end of the driveway for Ginny to drive up, the mail carrier arrived.

"Morning, Sharon!" Leah was always cheerful and had been on that route for many years. Everyone thought of her as a

friend. "I have a certified letter for you to sign for," Leah said as she jumped out of the car and began walking toward Sharon,

"Morning to you, too!" Sharon said with a smile, holding out her hand to take the pen from Leah's hand to sign the confirmation form. "Would you look at that stack of mail!" she exclaimed as she took the pile from Leah. It was several inches thick. "I cannot believe how many people Lucas knew," she told Leah. "Unless these are all bills, of course!" Leah said she hoped that wasn't the case and waved as she headed for the next house.

*What was keeping Ginny?* Sharon wondered as she began to open the certified letter. She wasn't surprised to see that it was from Lucas' insurance company. Everyone at the company had been very supportive and several top executives had shown up at the funeral. Standing there, she almost didn't open the envelope, but since Ginny was nowhere in sight and she had nothing else to do, she slid her fingernail under the flap and opened it, folding open the cover letter as she began to read. After a few sentences her knees buckled and she sank down on the cement driveway just as Ginny pulled up.

Ginny jumped out of the car, leaving the door open and the warning bell dinging loudly as she rushed over to Sharon.

"Are you all right? What happened? Did you twist your ankle? No, you couldn't have done that. You weren't moving. What happened? Are you all right?" Ginny tended to get flustered in an emergency.

Sharon silently handed her what had been in the envelope. Nestled inside the cover letter was a company check made out to her in the amount of one million dollars. She had had no idea that Lucas had that much life insurance. No idea at all. Wasn't that like him, Sharon thought. There were so many things she didn't know about him. When she regained her composure, she stood back up and she swore Ginny to secrecy.

Seven P.M. arrived and so did Sarah and Daniel. Sharon was waiting for them in the living room, seated in the middle of the sofa, with the folded letter from the insurance company in her hands.

“Why are we meeting in here? Why so formal?” Daniel asked.

“Because this is a very special day in this household and we will need to have a serious talk in a few minutes,” Sharon said with a curious little smile.

“What happened, Mom?” Sarah showed concern, thinking that something else had gone wrong for them.

“Nothing bad happened. In fact, it was something very good,” Sharon replied. “You both had better sit down beside me here on the sofa for this.” She patted the cushions on either side of her and the kids plunked down. “I’m going to hold this so you can both see it, and then I’ll let each of you hold it and take a closer look, because you’ll probably never see anything like this again in your entire lives.”

The kids both leaned closer as she unfolded the cover letter and revealed the check. For a few seconds no one said anything. Sarah finally extended her index finger and ran it over the six zeroes and the big solitary number one. Daniel put both his hands under his thighs so he wouldn’t be tempted to touch it.

“Is that...? Is it...? Nope. Can’t be. Is it...? He just couldn’t get his mind or his tongue to work properly as he stared at the check in Sharon’s hands.

“Oh! Wow! No. It must be a mistake.” This from Sarah. “They must have added an extra zero by accident or something. Mom, you’ve got to send it back. It’s a mistake. Did Dad really have that much insurance?”

Sharon couldn’t help herself. She began to chuckle at her two disbelieving children.

“It’s no mistake. This arrived with the morning mail and I called the company. It’s no mistake. Your father had his life insured for one million dollars.”

“Did you know that?” Daniel was up now and pacing back and forth.

“No. I had absolutely no idea. But I’m not terribly surprised now that I think about it. He did work for an insurance company, you know. And he did love us and wanted to provide for us if something ever happened to him. This is so like your father! It makes you appreciate him even more than ever, doesn’t it? He

didn't talk much about death and what would happen afterward, but he certainly made sure we would all be okay financially."

Daniel and Sarah were still a little speechless. The excitement would hit them in a few minutes, Sharon was sure.

"Now," she brought them back to reality. "We have a decision to make. What are we going to do with it?"

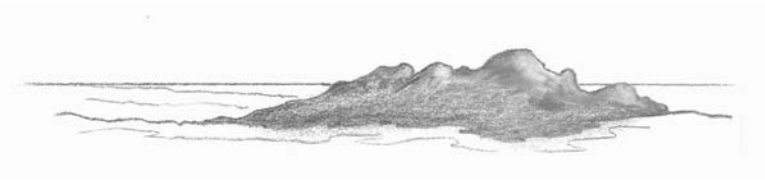
For the next two hours the three of them ate popcorn that Daniel had made to celebrate the occasion, drank lemonade (fresh-squeezed by Sarah while the corn popped), and sat on the floor propped up on the couch cushions as they tried to understand exactly how much money one million dollars really was. They finally gave up on the comprehension of it and just shared their thoughts. Sarah began.

"Mom, are we for sure going to do this *Light of Life Foundation* thing?"

Sharon turned to Daniel who nodded emphatically in the affirmative. Both of them turned to Sarah and nodded emphatically in the affirmative as a huge smile broke over that intelligent teenager's face.

"Then I vote we use most of the money to start the foundation and whatever else we need to do to make Dad's legacy last forever."

"All in favor?" Daniel used his best moderator voice. Three hands shot into the air. The other three hands joined together in the air above the popcorn bowl sitting on the floor in the center of their family circle. It was decided. The legacy of Lucas DeVitus would not only survive, but also thrive. Then Sharon and Sarah began to cry and hug each other as Daniel forced himself to stay composed by getting up to fill the empty lemonade glasses. There was work to be done on the *Light of Life Foundation* and the ideas were popping in his brain just as the popcorn had popped earlier. It was going to be a long night and he had no intention of wasting it by sleeping.



# SEVENTEEN

*At some point it becomes your choice...*

Sharon sat alone at the kitchen table with coffee and a croissant. It had been two weeks since the insurance check had arrived and it had taken two weeks to open an account, find a financial advisor who was wise when it came to foundations, and to wrap her mind around the idea that she hadn't really known her husband as she thought she did. *How could I have been married to him for 18 years and not have known so many things about him, especially the good he did for people he had never met before?* she wondered. *Why didn't I know this side of Lucas? Didn't he feel he could share that part of his life with me?*

Sharon had grown up in a barely-get-by mentality blue-collar family in Portland. She and her brother and sister had everything they really needed, including two loving parents who sacrificed to provide for them, and it had been a happy home. But her parents talked openly about how hard it was to make ends meet and Sharon had learned to be wary of spending money on extras because the day might come when she would need more money than she had. Lucas, on the other hand, had grown up poorer than Sharon, but for some reason, he viewed money and opportunity in a very different light. He believed money had a way of showing up when you needed it.

If she had one regret, it was that she had harped a little bit too much about financial security. *Well, she certainly had it now,* she thought as she dabbed her napkin at a tear that threatened to run down her cheek. *Thank you, Lucas. I really did love you with all my heart. And I miss you every moment of every day. I wonder if you can hear me. I'll choose to believe that you can. Enjoy Heaven, my love. There is no doubt in my mind that you are there, and that someday we'll be together again. I just know it in my heart.*

With a sigh she rose from the table to rinse her dishes and put them in the dishwasher. Her eyes fell on the two piles of mail that had arrived at the DeVitus home in the past two weeks. One

pile was full of normal mail that she must attend to tomorrow: household bills, condolence notes and cards, and offers to help her spend her money. *How did perfect strangers even know Lucas had died? So much for privacy in the grieving process.*

The other pile of mail was much more exciting. It contained responses from the people who had remained at the graveside service following Lucas' funeral to give her the letters—including Henry Willinger. The children and she had shared the process of inviting *The Twelve* (as they had dubbed them), each of them personally calling the ones whose letters they had read aloud at the family breakfasts following the funeral. They had all been gratified that each of *The Twelve* had gladly and enthusiastically accepted their invitation to the picnic at Portland Head Light. Even WT agreed to come. *No doubt wearing a veiled hat*, Sharon thought.

And then it hit her: She could now do something to help this woman who was fast becoming a friend. Something that would enable her to throw away all her veils! Through the *Light of Life Foundation*, Sharon could provide the reconstructive surgery that WT needed on her face and chest to remove the scars. Plastic surgery had come a long way in 14 years, and so had WT. But would she be able to accept this final gift from Lucas? Sharon knew it would be difficult for the woman who had suffered so much shame to surrender the veils and the quiet, subdued lifestyle she had adopted as a way of coping. But Sharon believed if anyone could convince her to take this step of faith in her future, it would be Lucas' family. She and WT had talked frequently over the past two weeks and, with Sarah and Daniel's permission, she had shared the vision of the *Light of Life Foundation* with her. Sharon had never expected such excitement from the emotionally wounded and withdrawn woman. WT had even taken the initiative and called Sharon a couple of times with ideas that had occurred to her.

Suddenly Sharon's face expanded in a joyous smile. *That's IT!* she thought. *That's definitely IT! Thank you, God, for the answer to everything!* She couldn't wait to tell the kids tonight at their weekly family council meeting. Daniel had suggested they meet every Sunday night to discuss the foundation and get direction for the coming week, and Sharon realized with motherly pride that the young man was trying to step into his dad's shoes as head of the family. Lucas would be so proud. She knew *she* was.

At 5:30 P.M. that night Sarah, Daniel and Sharon gathered around the dining room table with a light supper of hamburgers Daniel had grilled on the deck, chips, and chocolate zucchini cake Sarah had made that afternoon. The children had voted years ago to do the cooking on Sunday nights to give their mom a vacation from the kitchen. She had been delighted at their thoughtfulness and looked forward to their cooking concoctions once a week. Some of them had been nearly indigestible in the early years, but they had improved with experience.

Sharon could hardly wait to share her ideas with the kids. After Daniel had officially called the business meeting to order and Sarah was ready to take notes with her laptop, Sharon began the discussion by telling them how frequently she and WT had talked on the phone in the past week. Sharon told them that WT was so excited and enthusiastic about the foundation that she kept calling Sharon to share her ideas. She told the kids that more than anything, she wanted the foundation to help WT by paying for reconstructive surgery to remove her scars. Sharon told them she had seen a well-known and respected reconstructive surgeon in Portland just this past week. He said he couldn't promise perfection but he did believe he could help WT achieve a more normal appearance. Sharon thought that would help raise WT's self-esteem and allow her to lead a normal life—veil-free. It would all take time, of course, but he was anxious to meet WT in person and do a more thorough evaluation. If she were willing, that is. And that was the sticky wicket. Would WT be willing to undergo the necessary surgery and recovery period? And would the foundation be willing to foot the bill to make WT whole again, both in body and in spirit?

Sarah looked at Daniel and Daniel looked at Sarah. Without speaking a word, they both turned to look at Sharon and exploded with a resounding YES! With eyes glowing, Sarah summed it up.

“Mom, if the foundation cannot do this for WT, then what is the foundation for?”

“Who deserves this help more than WT?” Daniel added. “I agree.”

The smiles on the three faces could not have been wider.

“Great!” Sharon said. “How are we going to tell WT?”

Groans from Sarah and Daniel. Then Sarah had an idea.

“Why don’t we invite her for dinner some Sunday night? She could be a guest at our council meeting and we could bring her up to date on what’s falling into place with the foundation.”

“I really like that idea,” Sharon enthused. “While she’s here we can bring up the possibility of the reconstructive surgery. She is the only one we’ve told about the foundation, you know, so she’s kind of in our inner circle already. The rest of The Twelve will have to wait for the picnic to find out what’s going on.”

“Mom?” This interruption from Daniel. “I’ve been reading about how foundations are operated and we definitely need a board of directors. Do you know anything about that?”

“Not yet. But I have an appointment this week with a lawyer who handles the business for several foundations in the area. I made some calls and when I got the same name three times, I called his office and made an appointment. I’ll see him Wednesday at 2:00 P.M. So I’ll know more after that. If either of you has questions, why don’t you give them to me now so I can get the answers for you?”

The next few minutes were an eye-opener for Sharon as she wrote down the kids’ questions and thoughts furiously on her napkin until Sarah offered to do it on her laptop and e-mail them to her later. She was amazed at the amount of thought these two teenagers had given to the foundation’s business. It was a measure of their commitment to their dad’s legacy. When the questions were finished, Sharon played her trump card.

“I got another inspiration this week and it’s been confirmed here tonight,” she began. “From what I’ve read, it would be better if someone other than a family member were the executive director of the foundation. So I was wondering what you both would think of asking WT to be the executive director of the *Light of Life Foundation*.”

There was silence for about five seconds and then an excited nod of agreement from both of the younger DeVitus family members.

Now all they had to do was convince WT that she could do the job. This was going to be a tall order but probably no more difficult than convincing her to have the reconstructive surgery.

One week later the date for the picnic with The Twelve had been set and all of them had confirmed that they could be with the DeVitus family at Portland Head Light to hear their big announcement on Saturday, August 30<sup>th</sup>. Even though it was Labor Day Weekend, they were all available. This was confirmation for Sharon and the kids that they were on the right track. They had three weeks to pull all the details together. They needed to hustle.

Since they wanted to announce WT as Executive Director at the picnic, Sharon decided she should meet with WT sooner rather than later to talk with her about the reconstructive surgery as well as see if she would accept the executive directorship. She dialed the number and her friend answered on the fourth ring.

“Hi, WT! It’s Sharon. How are you tonight?”

“Hello, Sharon. I’m doing well, thanks. How are things with you? Are you getting excited about the picnic?”

“We are! We’re planning and preparing and we came up with something I’d like to run by you. Do you have any time this week when I could take you to lunch? I’d be glad to drive down there. You have someone who could cover for you for a couple of hours, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. Shirley would be happy to do that for me. She works from 11 to 3 so she doesn’t take a lunch hour. Would that timeframe work for you? Maybe on Tuesday?”

“That works fine for me! Thanks for being available on such short notice. I think you’ll be interested in what we’re thinking and we’d like your opinion. I’ll be there around 11:30. Would that be okay?”

“Yes, that’s fine. 11:30 on Tuesday. Looking forward to it!”

“Bye for now.”

Sharon hung up and gave a thumbs-up to Sarah and Daniel, who high-fived each other.

The following Tuesday, Sharon parked in front of the consignment shop on Elm Street in Biddeford. The cheerful red and white sign over the door read. *Je Reviens!* Sharon smiled. What a

great name for a consignment shop of women's clothing. It literally meant *I Will Return!* WT was ready when Sharon entered the shop. After exchanging hellos, the two women got into Sharon's car and drove to a great seafood restaurant on the road to Biddeford Pool. They caught up on each other's news during the short drive and once seated at the restaurant their orders were taken and their meals arrived quickly. When Sharon sensed the timing was right, she brought up the subject of needing an executive director for the foundation. WT agreed right away that they were definitely going to need one.

"How are you going to locate the right person?" she asked Sharon. "Will you advertise in the paper or will you do a national search?"

"We may not have to go through all that. Daniel, Sarah and I believe we have the right person for the job. We just don't know if that person is available and willing to take on the challenge."

"If it's the right person, Sharon, he or she will be available and willing. That's the way things work. When it's right, it's *right*. And when it's wrong, it's *never* quite right." WT chuckled, even though she was very serious.

"*You're* right," Sharon said with an enigmatic smile. Then she waited for WT to pick up on her hidden meaning. WT missed it completely. Sharon tried again. She was winging it here, trusting for the right words without being too adamant, fearful of scaring WT to death.

"*You* are right, WT," She looked intently into the other woman's eyes, willing her to understand.

WT looked straight into Sharon's eyes, picking up on something in her voice. Sharon just kept smiling, saying nothing more, giving her friend time to process the hints. Without her eyes leaving Sharon's face, WT slowly put down her fork, blotted her lips with her napkin and then placed it in her lap again. She pushed her plate back, folded her hands quietly on the table in front of her, and finally said two little words: "Excuse me?"

Sharon laughed, delighted that WT had caught her drift.

"The three of us have agreed. We believe you should be the Executive Director of the *Light of Life Foundation*. We'd like you

to accept the position. We haven't even considered anyone else. By the way, there's a good salary and benefits that go along with it. Will you do it? For Lucas?"

WT was speechless. Executive director of a foundation whose mission she not only believed in, but was a shining example of what help coupled with hope could accomplish in one life? She was honored, scared, excited, and worried all at the same time. Could she do this? Lucas would have believed in her, but could she believe in herself? All she was certain of was that if someone placed an open door in front of her marked *push* and she didn't push, she'd never know if she had missed a great opportunity to help others and to help herself. But she was still having trouble coming up with the words to answer Sharon's question. Would she do it for Lucas?" That loosened her mind and her tongue.

"For Lucas I would do anything. So, even though I'm going to go home and wonder if I've lost my mind, I will say yes. Yes, I will do this for Lucas. But also for you and the kids. You have all become very dear to me—like the family I lost and have never been able to find. I will also do it for the people who need hope and help when life turns against them. I will also do it for myself, because I know it will take something like this to bust me out of the safe, comfortable rut I've built for myself. I only have one reservation."

"And what would that be?" Sharon had reached across the table during WT's acceptance speech and was squeezing her hand. She smiled encouragingly at the woman across from her who had become like a sister to her over the past few weeks.

"I don't have any idea what an executive director does!" WT exploded in laughter. Sharon joined her, making the other diners glance over at them with curious smiles on their faces.

"Well, I don't really know what you'll be doing, either!" Sharon giggled. "But between us, we'll find out, okay?"

"Okay. You've got yourself an Executive Director!"

Then WT instantly sobered. "I can't do this!" she whispered as a sadness came over her face.

"Why not?"

"My scars! How can I be in the public eye with these hideous scars? No. No, it just won't work. I'll scare people away

rather than draw them in. It just won't work. I can't do it." She dropped her head in defeat.

"I understand," Sharon patted her friend's hand consolingly. "So we have an idea about that, too. I believe we've found a reconstructive surgeon who can reduce the scars so that they are almost unnoticeable. Then with special makeup, you would never need to wear a veil again. WT? Together we can make this happen. I just know it. Will you go to see the surgeon with me? In faith, I've made an appointment for tomorrow at 1 p.m. in Portland. I'll pick you up and go with you. Please say yes to this opportunity to turn your life around! We all want this so much for you!"

WT continued to hang her head for a few seconds. Then slowly she lifted it and brushed away the tears from her eyes.

"Sharon, I simply cannot afford any surgery."

"Is that it? That's no problem at all! The foundation will pay for it. We'll call it a signing bonus, like the big sports stars get when they change teams. This is your opportunity. Don't blow it. We can do this!"

WT reached across the table and took Sharon's other hand. Tentatively she smiled into her eyes and said very softly, "Okay. I accept your offer. *Both* of them. If I don't try, I'll never know if I could have done it, right?"

Sharon let go of WT's hands and clapped her hands softly in delight.

"Together we can do *anything*. Just watch us!"

The next day WT called Sharon mid-morning.

"Oh, no!" Sharon exploded when she recognized her friend's voice. "Tell me you're *not* going to back out!"

"No. I'm not thinking of backing out. Not on either offer. I believe I've got to play this out, no matter what happens." Sharon's sigh of relief came across the phone line to WT's ear. "No, I'm not backing out. I should have shared some things with you yesterday when we were together but you surprised me so much that I didn't do it. Today I received some more news and I need to tell you what has come to my attention. Are you going to

be home this evening? May I drive up to South Portland to see you?"

"This sounds serious. Is everything okay?"

"I'm fine. I've learned something that you need to know, and I want to share it with you in person, not over the phone. Okay?"

"Sure. You're welcome in our home anytime. You know that. See you about 6:30?"

"That should be fine. See you then."

At 6:35 WT pulled into the DeVitus driveway. Sharon opened the door and welcomed her with a hug. When they were seated on the living room sofa with cups of tea in front of them, WT began to talk.

"Two days ago I was contacted by Lt. Matt St. Pierre of the Rockland police. As you know, he had been in charge of the investigation into Lucas' car accident that took his life and they had questioned everyone who had ever known Lucas, including me. I thought I had told them everything I remembered about that night Lucas saved my life in that dark alley, but I remembered something later that I thought might be helpful so I had called Matt St. Pierre and left a message for him. Long story short, he called. We talked. He asked me to come to Rockland to give a statement and I went up there the day before you stopped in here and offered me a job and a new face.

"What I remembered all these years later was an unusual scar on the face of one of the men who attacked me. He was the man who was holding me down while the other man raped me. However, when Lucas approached, he ran to prevent him from saving me. I got a good look at him because his face was only about a foot above mine as he held me down. I didn't think it was anything that would help the police, but Matt had asked me to call if I thought of anything, so I did. They had asked the Biddeford police for copies of the reports of my assault and rape, so at least I didn't need to go through all that again. Matt was able to pull up some photos of men with facial scars on the department's computer, and I agreed to look at them. It didn't take long before I pointed to one and said, "That's him." Matt asked me if I was

certain. I just looked at him. It was all flooding back into my mind. “I will never forget one single little detail of that night. Not one.” I said. He printed out the photo and the guy’s police record. And then he told me what had happened to the guy in the fourteen years since I’d been attacked.

“The guy’s name was Caleb Brodie. Apparently after the three men left me for dead, Brodie didn’t have sense enough to get out of town. After Lucas took me to the hospital and made sure I wasn’t going to die, he went to the Biddeford police station and reported what had happened. They asked him to describe the three men. He could only describe Brodie because he had never really gotten a good enough look at the other two. He remembered a facial scar on the man’s forehead shaped like a half-circle. It was an old scar, but still visible since it was paler than the rest of his skin. I heard about the scar several months later, after Lucas had found me a job and an apartment. He questioned me gently one day when he stopped in on his way to Kittery. I did my best, but I had suppressed anything I hadn’t already told the police. I just wanted to forget the whole thing and get on with my life. Lucas understood and the matter of the scar was dropped. Until last week when Matt called me.

Actually he called to let me know that one of the men who had attacked me had been released from Thomaston State Prison about three weeks ago and he wanted me to be aware of it. It was Brodie. Somehow it brought the whole thing back to me and that was when the scar popped into my mind.” WT stopped to sip some tea and Sharon reached over and patted her arm comfortingly.

“I’m sorry, WT. You shouldn’t have to relive that terrible trauma again. I’m at a loss as to what this has to do with me and the kids, though.”

“Sorry. I’m rambling. I hate discussing this stuff so I’m putting off getting to the bottom line! I think I may know why Lucas died.”

“What do you mean *why* he died? Didn’t he die in a car accident? Is there more to it than that?”

“Matt shared the police reports with me so I know more now than I did before. Several weeks ago Lucas had gone to Rockland to investigate a claim. Brodie had been following him for

a few days, waiting for a chance to pay Lucas back for identifying him in the police lineup, ultimately leading to his arrest. He followed Lucas onto a back road that wound through wooded areas and had very little traffic. Brodie saw a bad curve coming up and grabbed the opportunity to force Lucas off the road. His car went over a steep, rocky embankment, rolling several times and coming to rest about 40 feet below the road level. Brodie pulled off the road and ran back to where Lucas' car had gone over the edge. He wanted to make sure Lucas was dead, so he scrambled down the rocky embankment to check. Although he was severely injured, Lucas was conscious and recognized him. I can't give you all the details the police report gave, because knowing my friendship with Lucas, Matt spared my hearing them. Lucas died in just a few minutes, but with his last breath he said three words to Brodie: I forgive you."

By now both Sharon and WT were crying hard. They were both grateful the kids were not home to hear all this. The two women held each other and sobbed their hearts out. Finally Sharon gathered enough courage to ask the obvious question.

"WT, how did the police find out all this? No one was there except Lucas and Brodie, right?"

"Right."

"So...?"

"Brodie was so taken aback by Lucas' forgiving him that he couldn't stand it. It apparently broke him like prison never had. It broke him like nothing else in his miserable life ever had. He told the lieutenant that looking into Lucas' eyes, as Lucas grabbed his arm and forgave him, was like looking into the eyes of God. After weeks of almost no sleep and no reprieve from the horrible guilt that hit him, he turned himself in to the Bangor police. They got the whole story out of him, including a signed confession, and something else.

Apparently, while Brodie was in prison Lucas had sent him a poem. Brodie said he had no idea what it meant, and to him it was just sounds that made no sense at all. But he kept it as a daily reminder of the guy who turned him in and who he swore he would hunt down and kill as he shoved the poem down his throat. But once Lucas forgave him he staggered back to his car and drove home. It was three weeks later just before he turned himself in that

he picked up the poem and read it for the second time. Except this time it made perfect sense to him. Brodie said that Lucas' forgiving him drove him insane with guilt for three weeks and that it was the message in the poem that finally broke him down and made him cry out to God, who he said told him to surrender.

As soon as Matt got it all sorted out, he came to my shop and told me. That was today. After I could compose myself, I called you and asked if I could come here tonight. I convinced Matt to let me tell you myself. He wanted to be here for you, but I thought it best if it was just you and me."

"Sharon," WT said. "He gave me the poem. Do you want to read it?" Sharon, with a dazed look on her face, nodded yes. WT hesitated. "There's something else." "Oh, God!" Sharon said "What else could there possibly be?"

"The situation is so strange, Sharon," WT said. "Lucas told me he had a poem for me around the same time he sent this to Brodie but he never gave it to me. I remember him trying to tell me about the importance of forgiveness but, as you can imagine, I didn't want to hear anything about forgiving anyone back then."

"I can only imagine" Sharon said.

WT continued, "I didn't understand it and (because Lucas was trying to help me forgive the people who attacked me), I didn't *want* to understand it. I remember being so angry back then. I remember Lucas trying to help me and then just letting me be angry. He was so gentle that I couldn't be angry with him for long. But when Matt came to me with this story and the poem, something changed inside me. It was like forgiveness was handed to me as a gift to give and receive at the same time. The strange thing is that I feel like this poem was meant for me, too. It may have been the same poem that Lucas wanted to give to me. I don't know how to explain it but as I read it I felt like the weight of the world had been lifted from my shoulders. I felt like it was meant for me to be reading it at that moment and that Lucas meant for me to read it that way. Am I making any sense?"

As Sharon thought back to her experience with *The Gift*, she simply said "I know exactly what you mean, WT."

“Here is the poem,” WT said, as she handed it to Sharon who took it and began to read.

### In A Dream

I met a friend today  
Who asked me who I was.  
I said I didn't know.  
He said I ask because

You seem to be a friend—  
There's something in your eyes.  
I said, “It may be true  
But I wear a disguise.”

He said, “What do you mean?”  
I said, “It's hard to say.”  
He said, “What is this mask  
That's getting in the way?”

I said, “I do not know.  
It somehow just appeared.”  
He said, “That seems not so,  
It's simply just too weird.

Why don't you take it off  
To let me see your face?”  
I said, “I wish I could  
but I live in this place.”

“What do you mean by that?  
What do you have to hide?”

I said, "The years have passed.  
The real me simply died."

"Oh, no. That can't be true.  
I'm speaking to you now.  
You're asking to get out.  
You just do not know how."

"You speak so strange to me!  
Why do you think you know?"  
"I know a lot, you see,  
I'm here to help you grow."

"It's funny now I see  
I think I know you, too.  
But why have you appeared?  
What are you here to do?"

"You see, we are the same—  
just different masks we wear.  
You know you're not to blame;  
You simply weren't aware.

We both reveal the truth  
Of everything we've seen,  
But we've come to this place  
That's simply in between.

My path was not so bad  
but yours has gone astray.  
I know you'll make it back  
But you must turn away.

We all have made mistakes.  
You may have gone too far  
But I can help you back  
To heal your spirit's scar.

All you need to do  
Is step back from your ways  
And ask the One above  
To free you from your maze.

For when you bend your knees  
And let go of your pain,  
Your heart will open up  
And you'll be free again.

So know this now, my friend,  
The life that you have led  
Was not a choice you made  
But one placed in your head.

But only you can change  
By letting go to love  
And leaving all the pain  
So you can rise above.

So know this now, my friend,  
On this you can be sure  
That you have been forgiven.  
Go now and sin no more.

Know this now—what you have become is not your fault, but what  
you continue to be, is.

Sharon broke down again and when she regained control she thanked WT for doing such a hard thing. “It means a lot to me that you would have such regard for my feelings. You’re a good friend and I’m very glad I have you in my life.”

“I feel the same,” WT responded softly. Both women were quiet for a few minutes and then Sharon asked the obvious question.

“How could Lucas have been so selfless as to believe that Brodie should be forgiven and to then forgive him with his dying breath? What kind of saint did I marry anyway?”

“The best kind,” came the instant reply.

“You’re right,” Sharon agreed. “But how do I tell his children what really happened to their dad?”

“You’ll find a way, and the children (as you call them), are very mature. I believe they will be a little shaken, but I also believe they will do what they think Lucas would want them to do: be strong for you and do the right thing as a family unit. I also think this is something you should tell them without my being here. So if you are okay, I’ll head home now.” As WT rose from the sofa, Sharon rose with her and they embraced.

“Thank you, WT,” Sharon held tightly to her friend’s hand. This will not be easy, but nothing has been easy for this family for the past few weeks, so we will ask God for courage and strength to get through this as gracefully as possible.”

They said their goodbyes on the front porch and as Sharon watched WT’s car turn out of sight, Daniel and Sarah walked through the backyard and into the kitchen, calling for their mom. She heard them and reluctantly turned and went into the house, shutting the front door behind her.

The next hour was difficult for the DeVitus family. Not surprisingly all three of them tried to put as positive a spin on WT’s revelation as possible, but it was hard. Daniel finally said he was going to his room to try to understand what he had just heard. Sarah said she was going to do the same. Both said goodnight to their mother who assured them she was coping and had done all the crying she was going to do for one night. By 9:30 P.M. all three of them were in bed, but it was hours later before they all actually slept.

Sharon was the last to fall asleep. Just before she closed her eyes, she managed to ask God to forgive her for having difficulty in forgiving the man who had caused her husband's death.



# EIGHTEEN

*The beauty of unstained eyes...*

Weather-wise the day of the picnic was everything anyone could have hoped for. Clear blue sky with just enough mare's tail clouds to make it interesting. The late August heat was a perfect 82 and a gentle breeze off the Atlantic kept any pesky bugs at bay.

The DeVitus family arrived an hour early at the picnic area set up for them under a tent on the grounds of the park at Portland Head Light. The tent company and the caterers were busily attending to all the details, making sure everything was exactly as had been ordered. It seemed a perfect touch that at that moment the local resident who was known as the daily bagpiper moved to the high knoll overlooking the scene and began to play *Amazing Grace*. Few knew who he was, but everyone loved it when he showed up and played for about an hour around lunchtime every day the weather allowed.

"Dad would have loved this!" Sarah exclaimed, though her eyes showed pangs of sadness.

"Yeah," Daniel added. "This is his kind of scene, for sure. Do you think he's watching?"

"I certainly do," Sharon said with conviction. "Your father would not have missed this for anything."

"He's probably asking God a few questions right now," laughed Daniel.

"You know it!" Sarah grinned. "I have a few of them myself I'd like to ask!"

"Like what?" Sharon said with curiosity.

"Well, for one," Sarah began, "I'd like to know why does it sometimes take losing someone before you really begin to understand and appreciate him? And then it's too late to tell him what you should have been telling him when he was still here."

Daniel spoke up. "I'd like to know the answer to that one, too."

He glanced over at his grandfather, Henry Willinger, who had insisted on driving them to the picnic in a royal blue limo. He had promised Daniel he could drive it back to the house. He wasn't going to take any chances that they would not arrive at the party safely. Sharon and Sarah had sat in the back seat, marveling at how easy it had been to get to know Henry, in spite of the many years of alienation between them. He truly was a different man than the one who had walked out on Lucas and Gram Anne. Everyone had felt awkward at first, but within a few minutes, bridges had been built and barriers had been crossed and by the end of the afternoon they first met, they all felt they had a new family member.

No one was more surprised at their acceptance than Henry himself. He had nearly lost it when Daniel handed him a gift-wrapped box when he drove up in the limo to pick them up. It kept those first minutes from being so awkward to have an object to focus on. Smiling and at a loss for words, Henry unwrapped the gift right there in the driveway while Sharon, Daniel and Sarah watched in anticipation. When Henry recognized what was in the box, it took him a few minutes to be able to express his appreciation. There in all its battered glory lay his old thermos bottle, the one Lucas had kept and used all those years, the only thing he had from his father.

"We all wanted you to have it, Henry," Sharon had told him. "Lucas carried it with him on every business trip."

"Thank you," Henry replied, deeply touched. "Shall we leave now for Portland Head? It wouldn't do for the DeVitus family to be late to their own party." Anything to get the focus and attention off his not-so-successful attempt to stifle his threatening tears.

Henry dropped them at the picnic area beside Portland Head Light and went to park the limo. WT had arrived a few minutes earlier and noticed them. She walked over to join them and had heard Sarah's question about why it sometimes takes losing someone to really know how much he or she meant to you.

"We don't always get the answers to our questions," she explained, "but sometimes we discover the answers ourselves as

life keeps moving along. That's what has happened to me. And this family has had a big part in helping me heal emotionally as well as physically. I want you to know how very grateful I am to all of you. You've made me feel as if I'm not alone anymore. And I thank you for that. It's part of why I'm so excited about today's gathering."

They each hugged WT and welcomed her to what was going to be a very exciting day for all of them. They didn't have to tell her that she was a very big part of that excitement as they announced her appointment as executive director of the foundation.

Within half an hour the parking lot began to fill up with cars of all makes and vintages. One by one, the invited guests made their way to the tent area and introduced themselves to the others already there. The DeVitus clan stood there watching the group dynamics unfold.

"I don't know why I was so nervous about all these strangers meeting each other for the first time," Sharon laughed aloud at herself. "I should have known they would find common ground and be easy in each other's presence."

"Dad is the common ground." Sarah stated proudly.

"Yes," WT answered. "We all have friendship with Lucas in common. Just see how great an influence one person can have? You all remember that as you grow older. Everything you do and everything you say affects and influences other people, either positively or negatively. Life is an awesome experience, and an awesome responsibility. And that's really what's behind the *Light of Life Foundation's* reason for existence." Then she looked at Sharon with a sheepish grin. "Oops! Sorry. I kind of got carried away a bit and got onto my soapbox. It's just that I am so *into* this whole thing I can hardly keep quiet!"

They all joined WT in laughing at her enthusiasm. It was laughter based on joy—the joy of seeing her so bubbly and happy. And without her veil. The DeVitus family knew how much inner strength she was exercising in showing her uncovered face. The reconstructive surgery was scheduled for the following week, and the surgeon had shown WT computer-generated projections of how he believed she would look in about three months after she had healed. Those images were burned into her brain, replacing the ones she saw in the mirror every day. She had chosen to focus on

the future instead of the past, and it was paying off in a renewed sense of self-worth that allowed her personality to shine.

By this time people began coming up to Sharon and the kids and shaking their hands or giving them hugs. WT made a huge effort and reached out her hand to a woman with a little girl with curly blond hair standing beside her, holding the hand of a man who was probably her father.

“Hello! I’m WT and I’m happy to meet you. Did you travel far to get here?”

The woman answered with a smile as she shook WT’s hand. “About three hours, but Madison had to stop a couple of times for potty breaks. In case you don’t know, that happens with four-year-olds! I’m Nancy Stanhope and this is my husband, Jim.” Jim shook WT’s hand and gave her a face-splitting grin. It was infectious, and WT smiled widely right back at him. Madison had not said anything, but had taken one long curious look at WT’s face and those standing around held their breath, fearful of what the child might say as she looked intently at WT’s scarred and uncovered face. If there were ever going to be an awkward moment, this was probably it. Then Madison smiled and pointed at WT saying, “Your hair is like mine!” Relieved that the awkward moment had passed, everyone chuckled. WT bent her knees and went down until she was at eye-level with Madison’s big blue eyes. “You’re right, Madison! We must be twins!” Everyone laughed again, including Madison, who promptly dropped her daddy’s hand and put her hand in WT’s. WT struggled with tears of happiness as she raised her eyebrows at Nancy who smiled her approval as WT and Madison struck off hand-in-hand toward the tent to see if there were any wayward cookies that hadn’t been put on plates yet.

The lobster and clam bake was served by the catering staff at the tables on the left side of the tent. The food was wonderful, especially since it was served with a refreshing sea breeze against the backdrop of the oldest lighthouse on the Atlantic Coast. There was plenty of time for the group to meet each other and exchange their memories of Lucas. If he had been there, he would have loved it.

By the time Sharon, Sarah and Daniel made their way to the podium on the right side of the tent, almost everyone was

seated and waiting expectantly for whatever the day would reveal. There was much speculative whispering as Sharon stepped to the microphone. Sarah and Daniel were seated in folding chairs behind her. WT was in the front row, petrified just knowing she would be the center of attention—scars and all in plain view—when Sharon announced her appointment as the foundation’s executive director.

Sharon herself wasn’t exactly used to being in front of a crowd, even though there were around 30 people there, not counting the handful of children who were playing on the swings with the two babysitters Sharon had hired for the day. This was, after all, a family affair, Sarah had reminded her. If she hadn’t met so many of them on her way to the front of the tent, and if she hadn’t felt she already knew them from reading their wonderful letters to her family, she would have been very nervous herself. But in many ways, these people had shared their hearts with her and she was ready to do the same.

“Good morning to all of you! Daniel, Sarah and I are delighted that you have accepted our invitation to this day that is so full of surprises for all of us. It’s been wonderful meeting you in person and feeling the special bond all of us share because we knew my husband, Lucas DeVitus, or he touched your life through his acquaintance with your spouse.

“To tell you the truth, after reading all your wonderful letters since Lucas died two months ago, Daniel and Sarah and I have often felt that we really didn’t know this man as well as we thought we did. But now we love him even more than before. What a wonderful man he was! And what a wonderful friend to all of us, as many of you can testify.

One of our hopes for this gathering is that you will all have ample opportunity to personally meet everyone here and get to know each other better. If you like what the DeVitus family is going to share with you next, you will be getting to know each other very well, indeed! Well, that’s enough mystery for the moment. Let’s get on with the real reason you’re here today.” She turned to her daughter and extended her hand to her. “Sarah? Are you ready to tell these friends our big idea?”

Sarah stood and walked to the podium with a smile on her face. Sharon took a seat and watched the slim young woman who showed absolutely no signs of nervousness as she adjusted the

microphone. Where did a fourteen-year-old get such poise? She was so ready for this moment!

Sarah explained to the crowd how the family had opened the letters given to them at the graveside service for her father and how they had been so proud of the man he had been. The group laughed as she told of the elegant breakfasts they had shared in the dining room every morning until they moved breakfast to the picnic table in the back yard because they simply preferred to be outside. Then she introduced Daniel and returned to her seat.

Daniel proved to be the best speaker of the three of them, much to everyone's surprise—even his own. He started with the funny story of the night all four of them ended up in the swimming pool, including the steak Lucas had been grilling for dinner. Then he moved on to how his father had always encouraged them to put themselves in the other person's shoes, try to think how the other guy might feel, treat people the way they wanted to be treated themselves. Then he spoke of Lucas' deep love for their mother and how it was a good example for him and his sister as they grew up and someday became spouses themselves. That reduced Sharon to unashamed tears. Then he told of the family's commitment to carrying on the message of help and hope that Lucas had lived every day. He talked about the universal need for hope and how they didn't need to go across the world to find a need. He even mentioned that someone (he didn't know who) had said there was a Calcutta in everyone's backyard and likened it to the way his father found someone who needed hope and encouragement wherever he went. At that statement people in the group nodded in agreement. And then Daniel gave his sister credit for coming up with the best idea to make sure their father's legacy of help and hope continued. He didn't explain what the idea was. He just turned the microphone back over to Sharon.

Sharon spoke of Sarah's idea of starting a nonprofit foundation whose purpose would be to perpetuate the work of spreading hope and help to everyday people facing everyday impossibilities. She began by telling them that the foundation would be called The *Light of Life Foundation* because Lucas DeVitus literally means *light of life*. She began to explain how it would all work, stopping several times to acknowledge applause from the group. Finally she abandoned her notes and asked the kids to join

her at the microphone. They were going to wing it the rest of the way.

“So, what do you think of this idea?” Sharon asked the group. With that came prolonged applause, loud whistles, and many people standing to clap even louder until everyone in the group was standing in support of the idea. And then Daniel took the mike and motioned for everyone to sit down.

Daniel called Sarah to join him and they both spread their notes on the podium. “My sister and I think we have the most awesome parents in the world. (More applause.) A few weeks ago our mom received a check from my dad’s life insurance. It was for more money than many people ever see in a lifetime.”

Sarah leaned into the mike and added, “We aren’t taking any of the money for ourselves. We don’t want a new house and we don’t want new cars, although it would be very nice if my brother didn’t have to always take the family car when someone else needed it! (Laughter from the group and even from Daniel.) Our college education expenses are already planned and covered. Our dad saw to that future need when we were each born. So, as a family, we voted to use Dad’s life insurance money to start and operate the foundation.”

That was when the DeVitus family lost control of the meeting. But they didn’t care one bit. People were standing and clapping, talking to each other excitedly, and some were even hugging each other—people they had met only a couple of hours before. It was pure, wonderful bedlam for a few minutes and no one even thought of stopping it. Caught up in the moment, Sarah and Daniel even exchanged a brief hug. Then Daniel motioned for Sharon to rejoin them and Sarah beckoned for WT to come as well. When all four of them were together at the mike, Sharon began to speak.

“That was a pretty amazing endorsement you gave us!” She held up her hand to stop any more applause. “We appreciate your vote of confidence, but we cannot run a foundation on our own. We are only three people and two of us are still in school! We would like to ask each of you who gave us a letter after the graveside service for Lucas if you would serve as directors of the foundation. What do you say? Will you help us?”

To everyone's surprise, including his own, Richard Lewis was the first person on his feet after a stunned silence lasting all of five seconds.

"I will!" he said with enthusiasm. Sitting beside him, his wife reached for his hand and held it supportively with an affirming smile on her face.

Helen Armstrong stood next. "And so will I." She remained standing, three seats over from Richard.

Nancy Stanhope looked questioningly into her husband's eyes. He nodded with a smile and she bolted up from her chair, saying, "Me, too."

Donald Paulson stood and in his best professorial voice said, "As will I." Then he grinned unexpectedly, making everyone chuckle.

Up they stood, one by one, including Father Pete, until ten people were on their feet as Sharon, Daniel and Sarah had hoped they would be. There was only one person who had not given an answer: Henry Willinger. All eyes focused on him as he slowly rose from his chair. The entire group seemed to hold its collective breath, waiting for Henry to speak.

With the tears streaming down his face, Henry focused only on Sharon and his grandchildren standing at the podium before him. With a tentative smile on his face, he looked at his family and asked quietly, "Do you really want me to do this?" Daniel looked at Sharon and then at Sarah. No words were exchanged because there was no need. Daniel leaned into the microphone and looked intently at his new-found grandfather.

"Yes, Grandpa. We all really want you to do this!" And then he grinned with pleasure as an astonished Henry Willinger let the tears run freely down his cheeks as he said in as positive and loud a voice as he could manage, "I'd be honored."

The entire crowd rose to their feet as one and the applause made saying anything else impossible. At that moment, Henry and Daniel's eyes met and locked as a silent bonding took place between the two men. It was a healing and defining moment for the DeVitus family.

Through all this WT had been standing slightly behind and separate from the family who were all at the podium. She was not

feeling as uncomfortable being in the limelight as she had felt the first few minutes. People didn't seem to be paying any attention to her—or her scars. She began to relax. And then Sharon turned to her and held out her hand. WT quietly gulped, reached out and took it as Sharon drew her forward and began to speak.

“Wanda Turcotte (or WT as most people call her), is a logical choice to be one of the directors of the foundation, but we came up with something different for her.” Surprised looks settled on the faces of the other directors who had all met and liked WT very much. Those who knew parts of her story thought she'd be a natural for helping the foundation. “We have asked WT to accept the position of Executive Director of the *Light of Life Foundation*. Is that alright with all of you?” Sharon smiled broadly as the audience rose to its feet and applauded loudly and long. Father Pete put two fingers in his mouth and gave a piercing whistle as happy tears ran down his face. He was not the only one in the crowd with wet cheeks.

It was all WT could do to not break down and cry as she stood there with her arm around Sharon's waist and Sharon's arm around her shoulders. But she held it in, because if she did cry, she knew the heavy makeup she wore would run down her face and she definitely did not want that! Someday soon, after the reconstructive surgery, she would not have to worry about shedding tears in public ruining her makeup ever again. When the crowd had settled down WT moved to the microphone.

“Thank you for this overwhelming honor you have given me today. I will do my best to justify your faith in me. Wouldn't Lucas be pleased with what has happened here today with all of us?” More enthusiastic applause from the crowd.

“There are three people who have not yet been given their positions and assignments, however: Sharon, Daniel and Sarah. So my first act as Executive Director is to ask each new Director to stand for our first official vote.” When all were standing, she continued. “I would like to propose that Sharon DeVitus be approved as the twelfth Director in perpetuity of the *Light of Life Foundation*. All in favor please say aye.” Without a second's hesitation eleven voices rang as one in a resounding “Aye!”

“Thank you. This means, Sharon, that you're going to serve on the board for the rest of your life, unless you ask to step down. Is that alright with you?”

Sharon was so choked up she could only nod her positive response. More applause, louder than the first. WT had one more piece of business to conduct and she did it well.

“That leaves the question of positions for Daniel and Sarah. I propose that these two fine young adults be appointed as Advisors to the Board, to serve an undetermined term in those positions until they reach the age of 18. At that time they will be eligible to be appointed as Directors. All in favor?”

As the ayes rang out, Daniel reached over to grab his sister’s hand and Sarah did something she almost never did: She hugged her brother.

In the midst of the excitement, as Sarah released her grip, Daniel stepped back and looked out past the lighthouse. In a daydream he imagined his father, Lucas, in Heaven looking down and watching this moment with him...

“*What do you think, Dad*” Daniel imagined himself saying to his father, and into Daniel’s mind came this response:

*“I’m very proud of you today, Daniel. I’m also very proud of your mother and sister. If you’re wondering how I am, I’m just fine. I am with God now and because God is in all things I am with all of you in your hearts forever.*

*Now that I’ve completed my journey I can really see clearly what my life and purpose were all about. Though I had glimpses of it while I was on Earth, it all makes perfect sense now. We are all here for a simple reason—to live and learn and share in this journey called life.*

*We were created to be free, and with freedom comes choice. And it’s the choices we make each day that ultimately decide our destiny. And remember this; there is no such thing as free will—you are either willing or not willing. This is the choice, to seek the Truth—in every moment, every encounter, and every relationship. It is your willingness that decides your destiny, not your willfulness.*

*In the end there are two simple rules that will lead to a life well lived and an eternity free from anguish. Those rules are simply these; seek first to do what’s right in every moment of your life and always choose to offer to others*

*what you would want and hope for them to offer to you in your moments of need. With these rules and The Light of Life Foundation you will be able to change the world. And if you're wondering how a mere million dollars and just a dozen or so people can change the world, just remember this; over 2000 years ago, a Light of life was sent into the world, and with just twelve people He turned the entire world upside down. It's time to do that again."*

The sun was shining brightly on Daniel's face as he imagined his father looking down at the rocky coast of Maine and Portland Head Light where Daniel was now looking up. As his vision faded, he pictured his Dad turning to follow his Father in Heaven—as he had always tried to do while he was on Earth.



## Afterword

Real heroes—*true* heroes—fly into our lives each day. They are like angels on Earth. It is the distractions of the world that sometimes keep us blind to their gifts.

### Where Angels Fly

Are angels real and do they fly  
In Heaven up above?  
Or are they here upon the earth  
To save us all with love?

And could it be that they show up  
In other common souls  
To pass the key to Heaven's gate  
While playing mortal roles?

How strange it seems and at odd times  
I hear an angel's voice  
Come from a stranger or a friend  
Who could not have such poise.

It sometimes seems that right on time  
I hear an angel say  
Through mortal voice, the perfect thing  
I needed for that day.

And what they say is no mistake.  
It came from up above  
Imparted to and right on time  
To me with perfect love.

So could it be that angels walk  
Into our lives each day  
In mortal masks with hidden wings—  
God working in strange ways?

The truth it seems can be passed on  
And through the strangest things.  
Yes, even when you hear the truth  
From angels without wings.



