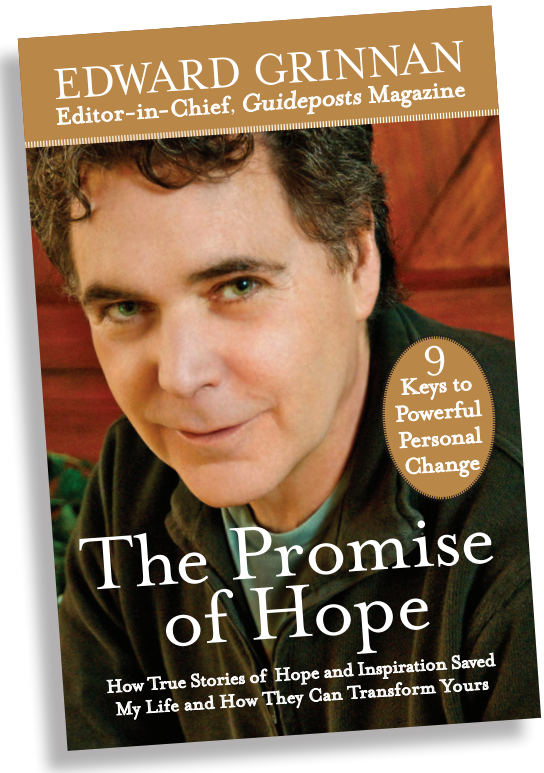
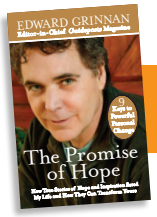



12 Guideposts Stories from

THE PROMISE of Hope





THE PROMISE OF HOPE

"LIFE IS DIFFICULT" wrote a best-selling author. And he was right. Life often tests our hope and faith with its challenges and difficulties. But the Guideposts stories mentioned in my book, *The Promise of Hope*, that you're about to read are the perfect antidote. They dramatically show how people just like you not only overcame illness and hardships, but deepened their faith in the process.

You'll meet a woman who's call to duty reawakened an old, but powerful dream, and whose personal transformation is nothing short of miraculous; a mother who found the strength to carry on with hope and faith after the greatest loss she could imagine; a man whose battle with mental illness inspired him to help others; a father who loses his job but finds a new path in life. Their stories are sure to move and inspire you.

—EDWARD GRINNAN, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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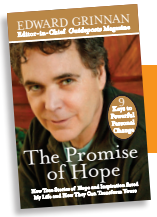


Trouble on the Trail

He became the first blind man to hike the entire trail—but at one point, he thought he'd never finish.

By BILL IRWIN , BURLINGTON, NORTH CAROLINA

NOVEMBER 8. WE'D been on the trail for two and a half hours that freezing morning when I had to stop to thaw out my feet. Orient, my dog, curled up for a quick nap and Dave McCasland, my companion for this final tough stretch in Maine, heated water for cocoa. I yanked off my hiking boots and rubbed my throbbing toes.

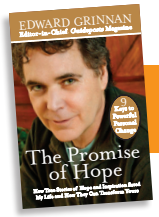
There are basically three types of Appalachian Trail hikers: the ones who walk on it just to say they've been there; the ones who hike it in modest stretches; and that driven breed, like me, who try to "thru-hike" from Georgia to Maine, a grueling 2,143 miles of unforgiving terrain that defeats 90 percent of thru-hikers who attempt it. And those were hikers who could see.

For the thousandth time since I left Springer Mountain, Georgia, on March 8, I asked myself what in heaven's name a 50-year-old blind man and his Seeing Eye dog were doing out on the trail. All I wanted now was to reach the end at Mount Katahdin, less than 200 miles away, so that I could go home and stop hurting.

But we had to keep moving if we were going to cover the remaining 15 miles to the town of Monson, our ambitious goal for the day. Yesterday we'd made only 5.3 miles. Ice on Moxie Bald Mountain had given me and Orient fits. I was a mass of scrapes and bruises. I laced on my boots and called for Orient. "We'll never make Monson at this rate," I grumbled.

Late in the afternoon we reached the confluence of Bald Mountain Stream and the West Branch of the Piscataquis River. Rain and snow had swollen the waters to a torrent. Dave said the river was divided into three branches, each about 30 feet wide. I could hear the roar of the rapids not far downstream, where the three branches joined.

I unharnessed Orient and told him to find his way across. He was a good strong swimmer. "See you on the other side, boy," I said, patting his flank. With arm's linked and backpacks loosened in case we had to lose them in a hurry, Dave and I inched into the icy water, using our hiking sticks for stability. We managed to reach a marshy island safely. But halfway across the next section, waist-deep in the surging current, Dave lost his footing and went under. I heard him sputtering and thrashing. An instant later I was swept off my feet and sucked downstream.



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I bobbed to the surface, clawing at the water. Dave had managed to reach shore and was yelling to me. I heard Orient whining anxiously. But I was making no headway toward their voices. In desperation I went to the bottom of the stream and tried to pull myself along with my hands. Each time I shot up for a gasp of air, Dave would frantically try to guide me. Yet his voice was getting farther away and the thundering rapids closer and closer.

I dug my fingers deep between underwater rocks. I was literally crawling underwater. Finally, with my strength about to give, I thought I sounded close enough to grab Dave's outstretched hand.

"Come on, Bill!" he screamed. "Right here!"

I LUNGED TOWARD THE steep bank but all I grabbed was air. I began slipping back into the current and downstream again. Suddenly I hit a branch and held tight. Dave was able to clutch my arm and pull me through the mud and onto the riverbank, where I lay gasping and choking. Orient ran to my side, quaking with fear.

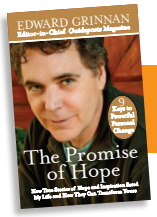
We needed to get warm fast. We had an hour till dark and less than that before hypothermia would begin playing its strange tricks on our minds. We forded the last fork then struggled up a long ridge for half an hour before Dave found a spot to pitch camp. Progress was slowed by our numb fingers, and there was not enough dry wood at hand to build a fire. Finally we got the tent up and ate some food, calories our bodies desperately needed to generate heat.

Shivering in our sleeping bags, an exhausted Orient wedged between us, we kept reliving the crossing. Had we lost our packs we would have been stranded without food or protection; many crossings still lay ahead on the way to Katahdin. Then for a long time we were silent. The only sounds in the dark were the chattering of our teeth and the wind lashing the tent. "Bill," Dave said softly at last, "how are we ever going to make it the rest of the way?" It was high time I asked that question of myself.

Actually my journey began in a tent not unlike the one Dave and I shared. I had never been much of an outdoorsman, but the previous summer I went camping in Virginia with one of my sons, Billy, and his son, Jonathan. That outing was an attempt to make amends for the life I had led until recently, and the harm it had caused my family, particularly my three kids.

I'd lost my vision completely in 1976 after a lengthy battle with chorioretinitis. But in a sense I'd been a blind man long before that, blind to anything in life that didn't have to do with my own selfish desires. I had four failed marriages to my dismal credit. The first produced my children and the last broke up after I'd gone blind. The common thread in the wreckage of all four was my drinking. After my last wife left me I was content to work as a training director for a clinical laboratory by day, and spend evenings quietly boozing myself into oblivion. I guess I gave added definition to the term "blind drunk."

Then, mysteriously, wonderfully, as if someone else's plan for it suddenly kicked in, my life changed. My other son, Jeff, entered a substance-abuse treatment center. To my dismay, I was asked to spend a week there in family therapy sessions with him—without a drink. I



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scoffed but I went. I lashed out at counselors and was my usual arrogant self.

But by the end of that week it became painfully clear to me that I was an alcoholic, and I had to stop drinking or I'd die. I stopped with the help of a 12-step program. I also quit a five-pack-a-day cigarette habit. Then, a few months later, I made a Christian commitment. It all happened so fast that sometimes it seemed like it was happening to someone else. But I knew there was a lot of unfinished business in my life. That's why I wanted to get away from it all with Billy and my grandson on that camping trip to Virginia and see if I could begin repairing relationships.

We happened to be camped not far from the Appalachian Trail, and Billy told me a little bit about it. That night, before sleep, I felt so overjoyed at my new life that I begged God to give me a way to show my gratitude.

THAT'S WHEN THE dreams started. I saw myself and Orient hiking from Georgia to Maine. It seemed like one of those absurd dreams, as if your mind is just taking out the mental trash in your sleep. Yet the dream came back again and again with such vivid clarity that finally I understood: The Lord wanted to put me on the Appalachian Trail so that along the way I could tell people about my new life.

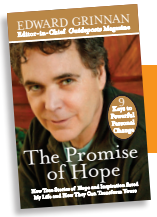
Which is what I eventually did, when I wasn't falling down and breaking ribs or crawling through boulder fields that sighted hikers negotiated in minutes. Yet it was an inward journey as well. I'd done 85 percent of the trail with just Orient at my side. Since everything you will need on the trail you carry on your back, you soon learn how light you can travel. You also begin to shed emotional baggage: resentments, intolerance, pride.

Hiking the trail was also a way of understanding the burden of possessing too much, both materially and emotionally. Each day and night, I had a clear mind and time to examine who I was, and long-forgotten memories rose to the surface. For instance, I discovered that I'd never really come to terms with the deaths of my parents. I hadn't started out to do the trail as some sort of quest for healing, but that healing happened.

Ever present was the danger of getting too far into myself the farther I went on the trail. I'd heard tales of thru-hikers who never readjusted to life away from the trail. Some hiked it again and again. Those were the ones who were desperately looking for something the trail couldn't give. In a way, they'd become addicted.

Now, shivering in my tent on this frigid Maine night, once again having failed to reach our goal for the day, and having put the lives of my friend and my dog in jeopardy, I had to ask myself if I hadn't become one of those desperate thru-hikers. After all, no one else was out on the trail this far into cold weather, so there was no one for me to tell about what God had done with my life. The most recent entry on the last trail log, 50 miles back, was three weeks old. I couldn't shake the feeling that I was running on pure ego, the very egotism that had made such a fiasco of my life.

Dear Lord, I finally prayed, if it is your will that we go on, please show me a sign. I was kind



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of hoping I'd have another dream, this one of me and Orient warming ourselves by a lodge fire and packing for the trip back home to Burlington.

But instead, the most amazing thing happened. Suddenly, inexplicably, I stopped shaking. Just stopped. An incredible warmth came over me. I felt warmer than I'd felt in weeks. Even my toes, which never seemed to thaw out completely, were warm. More than just physical warmth, it was a warmth that seeped all the way into my soul. "Dave," I said. "Dave, I believe we'll go on."

THIRTEEN DAYS LATER Dave, Orient and I reached Mount Katahdin, the end of the trail. Awaiting my finish were several national news crews; my sons; my daughter, Marianne; a host of friends; and 15 people from my church in Burlington who'd driven 36 hours so they could sing "Amazing Grace" to me. I knew it was the love and prayers of these and many other people that made it possible for me to become the first blind person to ever thru-hike the Appalachian Trail.

But I hiked the trail with Orient not just to show people what a "handicapped" person can do; I also wanted them to see what God can do through the power of his love, the love that guided and protected me every step of the way. It even kept me warm one night when I felt I'd never feel warm again, a mysterious warmth I will never forget.

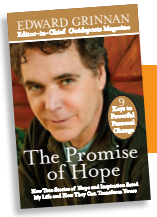
One of the things I decided about my life when I was on the hike was how much I wanted to be a family counselor. That's what I do today. I still do a little hiking too. And I still meet a lot of long-distance hikers out there trying to find themselves and resolve issues that can't be resolved by a trail, no matter how long. As a counselor I know they're just buying time, not solving their problems.

The answer is not on the trail. It's in you and your relationship with God. I've found that when you choose his path, he will do everything to help you stay on it forever.

About the Appalachian Trail

The Appalachian Trail—the longest continuously marked hiking trail in the world—stretches for more than 2,175 miles from Georgia to Maine. It followers the peaks and valleys of the Appalachian Mountains through 14 states and, unlike other hiking trails, which developed from the routes of Native Americans and pioneers, most of the trail was created where no footpath had existed before.

Benton MacKaye is credited as the father of the trail. An article he wrote in an architectural journal in 1921 fired people's imaginations. in less than 20 years the trail was a reality. Today it is overseen by federal, state and local governments, and partly maintained by thousands of volunteers. Because of the trail's length and location along the eastern seaboard, two-thirds of the people in the U.S. live within a day's drive of it. There is no fee for hiking the trail. For more information, go to the National Park Service site at nps.gov/appa/ or visit the website of the Appalachian Trail Conservancy at appalachiantrail.org.



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Called to Serve

She'd always wanted to join the U.S. Navy, but she needed to lose 100 pounds first. Would she find success and be able to help her country?

By AMY PRESSLEY PALACIO, OAK HARBOR, WASHINGTON

EVEN IN LATE September, the Florida sun can be brutal. I made my way across the parking lot, wishing I could move more quickly than my 270 pounds would let me. At the door of the Navy recruiting station, I stopped for a minute. Partly to catch my breath—walking winded me these days. Mostly, to work up my nerve to go inside and find out what it took to join the United States Navy.

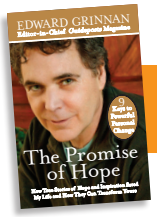
It was a dream I'd had since high school back in Waynesville, North Carolina. I couldn't explain it, really. It wasn't like I came from a military background or knew any sailors. I just felt this urge I couldn't ignore. I went so far as to sign up for my school's Junior ROTC program. No sharp Navy blues for me, though. They didn't make them big enough. I had to get my uniform custom tailored and listen to my classmates' jokes about hiring a tent maker. That hurt.

It would hurt even more, I knew, to be told to my face that the Navy didn't want me. Maybe that was why, after graduation, I buried my dream the same way I did other things that were painful—with food. And I went on with my life. I became a medical assistant, moved to Florida and bought a house. Not bad for a 25-year-old.

Except lately I'd been feeling unsettled. Like I was meant to do more with my life. I worked with the youth group at church, all the while praying for guidance myself. I started studying to become a registered nurse anesthetist. I even tried—half-heartedly, I admit—to tackle my lifelong weight problem, and got myself down a little from my heaviest, 302 pounds, size 26. Still something was missing.

Nine days earlier, on September 11, 2001, I was driving to class when I heard the news over the car radio. The World Trade Center and the Pentagon had been attacked. At school, I crowded around the TV in the lounge with the other students. I stared at the horrifying images on the screen, the tragedy unfolding. *You can't just stand here and watch,* I heard a voice inside say. *You have to stand up for your country and do something. Join the Navy.*

That couldn't be right. I had a job, a home, college classes. The Navy didn't make uniforms big enough for me back in high school, and I was even bigger now. *That dream died long ago for a reason,* I told myself. Yet it kept gnawing at me, that sense that I was supposed to do something more. Like this afternoon when I got stuck in traffic. I bowed my head for a moment at the steering wheel. "God, show me what you want me to do," I asked. "I just don't know anymore."



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I looked up. The first thing I saw was the bumper sticker on the car in front of me. "Pray for our country." It was like I was being called into service, drafted by a Higher Power. I knew what I had to do. Instead of heading home, I drove to the Navy recruiting station nearby.

And here I was, standing at the door. Now or never. I pushed it open and stepped inside. I tried to ignore the posters showing fit, strong young men and women in uniform and went up to one of the recruiters.

I took a deep breath. Then I said it: "I'd like to find out the requirements for enlisting in the Navy."

The man laughed. Right in my face. "Lose a hundred pounds," he said. "Then maybe we'll talk to you."

I turned around and stalked out of there, fired up like you wouldn't believe. That recruiter tried to kill it, I'd tried to bury it myself, but my dream wasn't dead. And now, so help me God, I was going to make it real!

AS SOON AS I got home, I picked up the phone and called the recruiting station. A different sailor spoke to me this time and answered my questions.

"I'd like to sit down and talk over the options with you," he said. "Why don't you come on in?"

What was the best way to put it? "Well, I'm a little chunky," I said.

"Not a problem! How tall are you?"

Five foot seven, I told him.

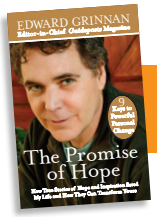
"At your height, you just need to weigh less than 173 pounds to qualify for the entrance physical."

Not a problem? Little did he know I had to lose 100 pounds to get there. If I needed motivation to lose weight, I had it now. I got off the phone. "God, I'm making a promise to you and to myself," I said. "I'm setting a goal. I will qualify for that entrance physical by my birthday." February 26. Just five months away.

With my medical background, I knew the keys to losing weight and keeping it off were diet and exercise. I started with my diet, changed it completely. No more processed stuff. No more junk. Only natural foods and whole grains. If God didn't make it, I wasn't going to put it in my body.

I broke my habit of just grabbing things off the shelves at the grocery store and throwing them into my cart. Instead I read labels carefully and paid close attention to the nutrients in everything I ate. Pretty soon I was buying smaller clothes every two weeks. Time to add exercise to my regimen.

I signed up at a Gold's Gym near my house. The owner, Tony, and I got to talking, and I told him about my dream. "Can you be tough on me and whip me into shape?" I asked. "Boot camp's going to be hard, and I don't want to be coddled."



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Tony grinned. "I like your attitude!" We'll get you in shape. I'll be the meanest I've ever been, if that's what it takes."

I couldn't afford a personal trainer, so just for me, Tony designed a weight-lifting program combined with cardio. Every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday he met with me and pushed me to work my muscles hard. So hard I whimpered sometimes. But I was grateful. I could feel the results. Each day, I was able to do more reps, more push-ups, more crunches than the day before.

I WALKED ON THE beach, building up my endurance until I could cover the same distance running. I rode my bike everywhere. I swam. I had a friend teach me how to surf. Paddling far out into the ocean and catching a wave back in—boy, that burns fat and builds muscle!

I'm not saying there weren't times I wanted to skip a workout and rest. Especially when it was rainy and cold, and training felt miserable. But then I would remember that voice I heard on September 11. *You have to stand up and do something.* I would remember the promise I'd made to God to honor the dream he had given me. *You can't give up,* I told myself. *Commitment is one of the Navy's core values.*

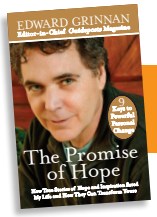
One day in late February 2002, I stepped on the scale. I looked down at the number twice to be sure. 170. I'd done it! I'd lost those 100 pounds.

I marched into the Navy recruiting station with my head held high. Nothing was going to stop me now. I walked right past the guy who had laughed me out the door last September and asked for the recruiter who'd taken the time to talk to me on the phone.

We got all the paperwork in order. "I'll escort you to the military processing station for your entrance physical," my recruiter said, checking his calendar. "That'll be two days from now. February 26." I knew the date. It was my twenty-sixth birthday.

Thanks to all the workouts at the gym with Tony, the physical was a breeze. By the time I left for boot camp in September, I was 158 pounds, a sleek, strong size 10.

On September 11, 2002, I stood in formation with my fellow recruits at a memorial service, wearing the uniform of the United States Navy. It was one of the proudest moments of my life. There would be more tests facing me, more struggles to overcome. The nine weeks of boot camp were notorious for being draining—both physically and mentally. But I was ready for the challenge, ready to grab my dream and run with it. I'd wanted to help my country. What I discovered was that I had to help myself first.



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Power Beyond "I Believe in Prayer"

How prayer helped build Habitat for Humanity

By MILLARD FULLER, AMERICUS, GEORGIA

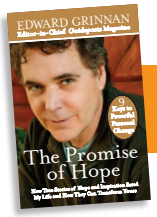
I'M A DREAMER, but I'm also a practical man. It's my nature. I see things that need doing, and I itch to get them done, and done right. Yet little of what I have accomplished in the last 18 years would have been possible without an element that some wouldn't think all that practical. Quite simply, this element is prayer. I believe that prayer has given me resources and power beyond my abilities. I have relied on prayer to build something from nothing many times.

Back in 1965, when my wife, Linda, and I were making a new start in our lives, we had no idea of what God expected of us. So we left our home in Montgomery, Alabama, and drove down to Florida with our two children in an effort to find a new perspective on things. I can still remember our first fumbling prayers during that week. "What do you want us to do, Lord? We just want to serve you. We're at your disposal."

A few months later the Lord led us to Zaire, the old Belgian Congo in Africa, where we visited missionaries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), who pointed out to us the pitiful living conditions of the people there. But, though we didn't know it at the time, the Lord had an answer for us the very next week after we opened ourselves to him in our prayer life. On the way home we stopped off to see an old friend who was living in a Christian settlement near Americus, Georgia, called Koinonia Farm. The word "Koinonia" comes from the Greek word for community, and the farm was just that, a community of believers caring for one another.

That day we also met the farm leader, Clarence Jordan, who had founded Koinonia in 1942. He told us how the interracial community had at first thrived by selling eggs and produce at a roadside stand until the Ku Klux Klan organized a boycott against its products and terrorized its residents during the late 1950s and early 1960s. By the time we arrived Koinonia had shrunk to just a handful of people.

From that visit on, Linda and I couldn't get Clarence Jordan's vision for a sharing Christian community off our minds. For the next few years I traveled and spoke ex-



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tensively about the needs we had seen in Africa. I also helped to launch a $10 million fund-raising campaign for a small black church-related college in Mississippi. In June of 1968 we returned to live at Koinonia. We were slow in learning it but this was God's answer to our prayers.

The first thing we did with Clarence Jordan was to reorganize the farm under the name Koinonia Partners—partners because we would be in partnership with God and with one another. Our first order of business was to construct simple but serviceable homes on 42 lots we laid out on the farm property. These houses were intended for low-income families who were living in tar-paper shacks nearby.

Had any realtor looked at our plans for financing, he would have said we were crazy. We resolved that we would be guided by a Biblical principle laid down in Exodus 22:25. We would charge no interest on our mortgages and make no profit. Furthermore, we would have low monthly payments, spread out over 20 years. Payments would be plowed back into a fund to build more housing.

When we started Partnership Housing in 1968, we didn't have the money to build one single house. What did we do? We prayed about it. And, having prayed, we asked other people to help, and we started building on a shoestring. We took Jesus at his word—literally. And we prayed—literally—asking that the money would come in. And it did.

WE FINISHED BUILDING houses one at a time, and soon families who had spent their lives in shacks moved in. How touched I was to visit an elderly man in his new home and hear him tell me, "When it rains, I love to sit by the window and see everything all wet. I'm sittin' in here, dry, and it ain't rainin' on me."

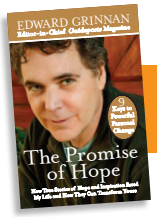
Clarence Jordan died suddenly in 1969, but by then he had lived to see his dreams for Koinonia reborn. By 1972, our first Partnership Housing project, Koinonia Village, was nearly finished and we laid out sites for 32 new homes in another section. Linda and I began to feel, with more and more skilled and talented people moving in, that our work was about completed at Koinonia.

Again, we drove down to Florida. We holed up in a motel in Tallahassee. After a whole day of praying and wrestling with the direction our life should take, our conversation turned to Africa. "I wonder what's going on in Zaire?" I mused to Linda. "Remember the pitiful shacks there? They sure could use some houses like we've been building at Koinonia—and other help, too." The more we talked about Zaire the more I began to wonder: Could the Lord be nudging me?

And then Linda said, "Why not give Bob Nelson a call?"

Dr. Robert Nelson was the Africa Secretary for the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). It was he who had arranged our original visit to Zaire. I dialed his headquarters in Indianapolis and talked to him about this strange idea about building houses in Zaire.

"Millard…" Bob exclaimed. "Your call…it's providential! Yesterday, a representative of



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the Zaire church was in my office. He was asking for someone to help with building development. And I had to tell him we were sorry but we didn't have anyone who could do the job." Had God spoken audibly, Linda and I couldn't have been more dumbfounded.

So we were off to Africa with our by now four children to build houses. The government gave us a tract in the middle of Mbandaka, Zaire, for 114 houses. But there was mind-boggling bureaucratic red tape and—at first—serious doubts that the houses actually would be built. There were shortages of materials and supplies and agonizing delays even when they were available.

Cement was our most important construction material. Just as we were about to complete the first of the houses, our supply dried up. Every morning I prayed about it: "Lord, let this good work continue. We're confident the cement will arrive. Just give us patience to wait on you."

When we were down to 35 bags of cement, Linda suggested that I try a British construction company that was working at the local airport. That same day they sent over 200 bags, and they supplied us with nearly 100 tons until our own cement arrived.

Three years after we had started the project we had a joyful celebration, dedicating 114 homes we had set out to build. That day the project's residents named their community Losanganya—place of reconciliation. Our prayers for housing in Africa had been answered.

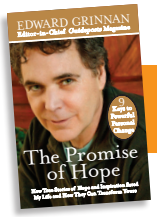
AND IT WAS this answer that fueled our hopes for an even larger vision. Shortly after our return to Koinonia Farm in 1976, I invited 35 people who had supported our work to a meeting. While we had been in Africa I had corresponded with a friend in San Antonio about a housing project for the homeless in that city. My dream was to expand this project across the entire United States and around the world.

In a three-day brainstorming session, we mapped out a new program and came up with a new name—Habitat for Humanity. We decided that the program would be financed by seeking donations and no-interest loans from affluent Christians and placing them in a Fund for Humanity. Once we had the fund started, we reasoned, it would sustain itself with no-interest payments from those living in the houses, and from volunteer labor from the families and other concerned people. It has done just that.

Our first project was to buy a few slum properties in southwest Georgia and fix them up with unskilled labor. In less than 10 years we built and renovated over 1,000 homes in 64 American cities and 11 foreign countries. Habitat for Humanity is a totally ecumenical effort to provide shelter for all of God's people.

Prayer keeps us in business. We seldom have enough money or materials, but once we make our needs known to the Lord, He has always delivered.

Take one summer when we started renovation work on an abandoned building in the heart of New York City. We were a little worried about the venture. After all, this was



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Power Beyond "I Believe in Prayer"

the impersonal "big city," and many were casting us as so many Don Quixotes tilting at windmills. We had just $15,000 in the bank to start renovation of a six-story tenement on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

For several months prior to our arrival, volunteers from local churches had worked Saturdays cleaning out tons of rotten boards and debris to make renovation possible. By the time our work group from Georgia had stepped off the bus to start work, we learned that most of that $15,000 had been spent on permits and building materials.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter were with us in the work party from Georgia. In fact, President Carter was largely responsible for getting the group together, and he and Rosalynn were hard workers during our week of intensive renovating. We wondered how the press would respond. Would our efforts be put down as mere publicity-seeking?

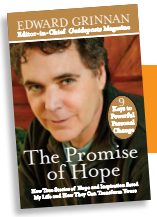
At first I felt as though the whole city was waiting for us to fall on our faces. "Lord," I prayed, "you know our situation. We need materials. We need cash, and we could use a few more skilled people to help us. Lord, we know you won't let us down, because we're going to do everything we can to make this project a success."

EACH MORNING WE arrived bright and early and began ripping out rotting timbers and replacing them with strong new ones. Soon I believe people began to see that our little group from Georgia meant business. Then things began to happen.

Literally hundreds of affirming news stories began to appear on TV, in papers and magazines throughout the city and the nation. In New York the outpouring of support was incredible. Individuals gave us checks and cash—from $5 to $10,000, unions donated labor, businesses contributed materials and the use of equipment, and on our final day, a large gathering at St. Bartholomew's Church collected nearly $10,000 for us at a special service.

And there was more, much more, such as the woman who came down from the Bronx to give us a geranium as a symbol of hope, and the Chinatown restaurateur who gave us a gala dinner for free. By the time Linda and I left New York, it was no longer the impersonal "big city" for us; it was a warm, loving and caring place.

Once again we had asked, blessed our petition with the work of our minds and bodies, and had received. Yes, I believe in prayer. I believe it empowers me, moves me past need, past difficulties and obstacles. And I believe that prayer is a real and living force that can work for you, too. G



The Seven Summits

Climber Lori Schneider battled more than just MS to fulfill her dream of reaching all seven of the world's highest summits.

By LORI SCHNEIDER, BAYFIELD, WISCONSIN

MT. EVEREST'S SUMMIT, the highest on earth, looms 3,000 feet above me, its outline barely discernible in the darkness.

I've climbed for most of April and all of May to get here, Camp Four—26,000 feet above sea level. In a few hours, our team will begin the final all-night push to the top, a grueling effort in nearly oxygen-less air with temperatures at double digits below zero.

Will I make it all the way up and down again? A 52-year-old woman? Or will I collapse and turn back, or worse? I've always heard Everest is as much a mental test as physical. Now I know what they mean. Especially for someone like me. I go over my mental checklist—extra oxygen canisters, hydrating fluid, energy bars, gloves and, of course, the banner I brought.

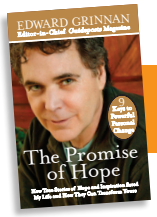
This is a moment I never dreamed possible 10 years ago, at the beginning of my quest to scale the Seven Summits—the highest peaks on each continent. So much has changed since then!

When I climbed Argentina's 22,841-foot Mt. Aconcagua, only my parents and husband knew the challenge I faced. I kept it secret even from fellow climbers. I thought people would see me as a lesser person if they knew. Yet it was on that climb with Dad—the second of my Seven—I had to face something more frightening than my secret. I had to face myself.

My dad, Neal, is my closest friend and an avid outdoorsman. We set our sights on Aconcagua a few years after our first Seven Summits climb, Mt. Kilimanjaro, in 1993. That one had been to celebrate Dad's sixty-first birthday.

Aconcagua was for Y2K. What better place to greet the dawn of a new millennium than the highest mountain in the world outside Asia? On top of Kilimanjaro, I'd never felt closer to Dad. His incredible faith, forged in running the family funeral home in Wisconsin, never failed to fortify mine. I couldn't wait to make another climb with him.

Then came that terrible morning in January 1999, less than a year before we were to attempt Aconcagua. I awoke to a nightmare: One half of my body was numb, as if someone had drawn a line down the center of me. Soon the numbness spread. What's happening?



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

The Seven Summits

Many tests later the doctor said the fateful words: multiple sclerosis. The doctor told me the disease could go into remission, but my mind froze on a line I'd heard as a child: MS—crippler of young adults. This can't be happening to me.

My identity was centered around the idyllic Rocky Mountain High lifestyle I lived in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. I was a first-grade teacher, married, living in a beautiful house. I skied, hiked, worked out. I'd never be able to do any of those things in a wheelchair.

My friends were outdoorsy types. None of them had a serious illness like MS. How could I tell them? What would they think of me? A week later, alone, I tried to ski. I would defy MS, deny I had it. I wouldn't give it my respect! I nearly killed myself.

When I was with friends I lived in fear that the slightest hand tremor would betray my secret. I began steroid treatments and slowly the symptoms decreased. But my fear that MS would one day leave me crippled wouldn't loosen its grip.

BY SUMMER THE stress of keeping my secret was overwhelming. I had to talk to someone. I flew home to Wisconsin to tell Mom and Dad. "Lori, no matter what, we'll always be here for you," Dad said. "You're going to be all right." Mom hugged me as hard as she could. I didn't think she'd ever let go. Back home in Colorado I couldn't bring myself to talk about my MS. The months passed in a haze of apprehension. But the treatments were helping.

As fall faded into winter I was hiking miles without getting winded. I'd never stopped dreaming of climbing Aconcagua and as the date grew closer, it seemed more and more possible. Knowing Dad would be with me provided extra reassurance. He was 68. I knew this would likely be his last climb. I needed him by me, needed to feel his faith.

I told Dad I still wanted to try the mountain, but I didn't want to tell anyone about my MS. Dad agreed to keep my secret. In December, we traveled to Argentina and began the three-day hike to the foot of the South American giant.

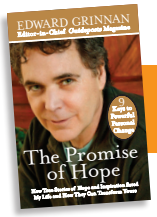
At base camp, 14,000 feet up in the Andes, our tent pitched on a sea of rocks, fear gripped me. What if the altitude triggered my MS symptoms? Was this just more denial, like my skiing disaster? Except that one false step here could kill me.

Five days later, at 18,000 feet, the danger hit home. I lay awake listening to a vibrant 35-year-old woman in the tent next to mine, battling high altitude pulmonary edema. I heard her deep hacking cough through the night, then moaning, then silence. She died.

The next morning we broke camp and had hiked for about an hour when Dad stopped. "This is my summit," he said. "I can't breathe. My head is pounding. I have to get back to base camp."

"I'm going with you," I said.

Dad shook his head. "This is your climb. It's something you have to do for yourself. You can't turn back now." If I didn't at least try to reach the summit, I'd always be



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plagued by doubt. About my illness. About myself. Dad kissed me. He started down the mountain. I watched until he faded from view.

I struggled higher with the team, but my mind was far away. Would Dad be okay? I thought about the times we'd spent together, how he'd always been there for me. Now I was on my own. Just me and my MS.

I thought about how Dad had devoted his life at the funeral home to helping people deal with loss and pain. Suddenly I understood why he wanted me to continue alone. I needed to prove to myself I was stronger than my fears. He wanted me to test my limits.

After another freezing night in our tents, we climbed to Camp Four at 19,700 feet. A day of rest and then we began the push to the summit. It was New Year's Eve, on the cusp of a new millennium.

I slogged through snow, stumbled over rocks and dirt. Bitterly cold wind buffeted us. Every step, no matter how small, was agony. The summit felt as far away as the moon.

The guides urged us on: "Take 30 steps!" Then we were allowed a brief pause before taking 30 more. Anything less and the temptation would be too great to sit down and not get up.

A FINAL STEEP, 600-FOOT pathway of loose, slippery rock. Visibility was awful. I felt isolated. I pushed on, rocks cascading down the trail. Then I looked up and saw a hand in front of my face.

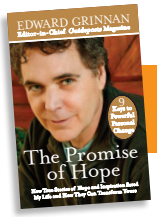
"Grab on," a voice said. I reached out and a guide hoisted me up. I'd made it, almost 23,000 feet above sea level. I'm sure the view would've been spectacular had the summit not been enveloped in clouds. But another view lay before me in the swirling mist, a view of my life. One day I might not be able to walk. For now I'd continue my Seven Summits quest. And I'd tell the world about my MS.

Now, as I finish my dinner on Mt. Everest, I think about my tearful reunion with Dad back at base camp on Aconcagua. He'd been so proud of me. My life changed dramatically after that. And it was anything but idyllic. My marriage dissolved. I left my job. For a time I moved home with my parents.

Then in 2002 Mom died. She taught me that every day is a gift. I wanted to spend the time I had pursuing the Seven Summits and bringing attention to MS. In the next six years I climbed Europe's Mt. Elbrus, Denali (Mt. McKinley) in Alaska, Australia's Mt. Kosciuszko and Antarctica's Mt. Vinson.

Sharing my story allowed me to meet thousands of others with MS. For many of them, just getting out of bed was a major achievement. Their struggles made Everest seem almost insignificant. "You carry all of us in your backpack," one person wrote me.

We start climbing. Only a thin ray from my headlamp breaks the darkness. Aconcagua's 30 steps between breaks seem a lark. Here, on Everest, our bodies scream after five. About 4:30 a.m.—after we'd climbed more than six hours in the dark—the sky begins to lighten and a breathtaking sunrise breaks across the mountain peaks.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

The Seven Summits

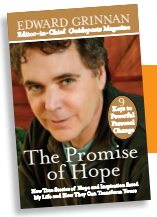
I feel as if I'm absorbing its energy. But soon snow and clouds grow thick around us. Dear God, don't let us turn around now. Not this close.

Three more hours of climbing, and we reach the Hillary Step, a 40-foot rock wall that can only be negotiated one person at a time using fixed ropes. I climb across boulders the size of cars, the drop thousands of feet down on either side. Don't let fear in, I chant to myself.

THE SUMMIT IS ahead, but the snow is blinding. "How much farther?" I finally ask my Sherpa guide. "You see those people over there," he says, pointing to a group a few feet ahead of us. "That's the top."

I'm there. There's not a single step on earth that would take me any higher. I pull the banner from my pack in honor of the first World MS Day and unfurl it. I think about all the people it represents. This is for you. Thanks for lending me your courage. Then I grab a satellite phone. There is one more person I need to thank. In Wisconsin a phone rings. "Dad," I pant, "I made it. I'm on the summit."

"Congratulations," he says. "I've been praying for you. I knew you could do it. Now we've got to get you down." The storm's growing. No time to linger. But I'm not worried. Fear can be conquered, one step at a time. Even now, in the blinding wind, the view is beautiful.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Why Waycross?

I have discovered my own personal key to faith. It's what people once said I couldn't do.

By MARTY VIA, WAYCROSS, GEORGIA

PLANS HAVE NEVER been my specialty. I've basically spent most of my life going from one thing to the next, playing whatever hand I'm dealt. For a long time I felt like that hand was a pretty bad one.

Growing up on a farm, I went to church occasionally, though I can't say the pastor's words really got through to me. We were poor, and I was a little guy, but I made up for it in spunk. By the time I could walk, I was up to no good. My teachers said I just never listened.

At age 18 I joined the Army. More discipline problems. I couldn't stand having people tell me what to do—not exactly a useful attitude in the military.

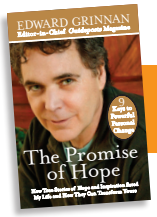
I got married while in the Army and we had a child. After discharge, I started working construction. But by that point drugs and alcohol were more important to me than family. My marriage fell apart. One day I found myself alone in an empty apartment. I was burned out, miserable. I longed for someone to give me advice, to tell me what to do. I thought about my parents, about the pastor at church when I was a boy, about my teachers, my drill sergeant, my boss. They had all said the same thing: You don't listen. "Lord," I said out loud, "I realize I haven't done a good job leading my own life so far. I need your help, and I'm ready to listen."

I dug out an old Bible that I hadn't opened in years. The words jolted me. The very next Sunday I went to church—this time with my ears open. I put my problems in God's hands and gave up drugs and booze for good. I met a beautiful woman named Dale. I admired her close, trusting relationship with the Lord, the strength that had helped her to raise two kids, Chris and Lindsay, on her own. We married and moved to Ohio. At 31, I was a changed man.

I still worked construction, and one day, carrying an armful of steel pins across muddy ground, I slipped. The pins came crashing down on top of me. I was laid up for weeks, and our tiny savings dwindled to nothing. *Lord, I can't support my family if I can't work. What am I going to do?* The answer came through our church. Our pastor gave me a job at the benevolence mission, handing out clothes and household goods. My first client was a single mom. As I helped her pick out some things she needed, we got to talking. She told me about her problems with drugs. "Have you tried asking God for help?" I asked. We ended up on our knees together in the piles of clothes, praying that God would turn her life around.

"You have a talent for ministry, Marty," my pastor said after she'd left. "Have you ever thought about preaching?" I'd never heard that before. I thought that to preach you need to go to seminary and study. "I'm not the preaching kind," I told him. "I don't have what it takes."

"You never know," Pastor said.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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Then came that April Sunday when I was driving the family to service. I distinctly heard something, an urging from deep inside me. *Marty, get your house together. I am calling you.* The words were clear as day. I knew immediately that it was the Lord speaking. I felt a tingling excitement spread through my whole body. A moment later I heard, *Take your family and leave church.* "What are you asking me, Lord?" I whispered. *Get your house together.* I pulled into the church parking lot. Through the door I could see folks talking and settling down for service. *Lord,* I prayed, *I'm trying to listen. If you really want us to go, tell me through Dale.* Almost at once, Dale turned to me. "This might sound crazy, Marty," she said, "but I feel like we're not supposed to worship today."

WE DROVE HOME, filled with a sense of wonder, an almost frightening awareness that something big was happening, that our lives were about to change. We went straight up to our room and knelt by the bed. I squeezed my eyes shut and opened my heart to God. I distinctly heard the word "Georgia." I turned to Dale. "What's God telling you?"

"I think we're supposed to go to Georgia." Georgia! I'd only been there once, I didn't know a soul, I kept praying. Another distinct thought came to mind. "I think we're supposed to go to a place called Waycross," I said.

"Is there really such a place in Georgia?" Dale asked. We got out our atlas and opened it to the map of Georgia. Sure enough, there was Waycross, a small town perched on the edge of the Okefenokee Swamp. Dale and I exchanged worried glances.

"Are we really going to do this?" I asked.

"If we're sure it's his will," she said, "then I think we should."

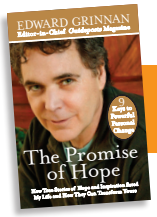
"It just seems so unlikely," I said.

Dale called in Chris and Lindsay from the backyard. We explained that we were feeling led to move. "We're not sure where the Lord wants us," Dale finished. She gave them each a blank piece of paper and a pen. "I want you to go up to your rooms and pray about this and write whatever you think of."

Chris came down first. "This is all I could get, Mom," he said, handing her the paper. On it was written the word "way." Lindsay followed, looking disappointed. "I couldn't think of anything," she declared, "just this." She held up her paper. It had a large cross. I felt a tingle of excitement run through my body again, and when I met Dale's eyes, I knew she felt it too.

Every reasonable instinct told me it was crazy for us to leave our church, to move to a faraway town we'd never even seen. Every night I offered up my doubts to God. And every night I was filled with that same sense of certainty: *You are doing the right thing.*

We rented a moving van and headed south, Chris and Lindsay in the backseat with the cat and the boxes, Dale up front with me, a roadmap spread across her knees. We only had a vague idea how far it was to Waycross, and as we left Ohio behind and the terrain became unfamiliar, the doubts returned. We pulled into Waycross after 18 straight hours of driving. There wasn't much to see—row upon row of pine trees, run-down houses, empty store-



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Why Waycross?

fronts, a Piggly Wiggly. My heart sank. I'd uprooted my family, and for what? What have I done? There's nothing here for us.

That first night, we slept in a campground on the edge of the Okefenokee. "You'll want to keep your cat locked up," a park ranger advised us, "the 'gators eat small critters like that." There had still been snow on the ground in Ohio when we left, but here the heat was stifling even after dark. I tossed and turned, listening to the strange hoots and howls coming from the swamp.

The next day we drove into town and found a cheap house to rent, then Dale and I scoured the town for work. We went everywhere from the convenience store to the lumber mill, but times were tough in Waycross, and we had no luck.

One evening a few weeks later, I lay in bed offering up my usual prayers for guidance. *Our money's running out. This seems like a dead end, Lord. Did I hear you wrong?* It was another hot night—we couldn't afford air conditioning—and the humid air seemed to lie on me like a damp blanket. Then I heard it: *Workers I have many, ministers I have few.* "But all I know how to do is work with my hands," I said out loud. "I'm not qualified to be a minister."

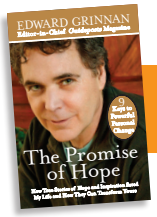
I WOKE UP AGAIN around three in the morning. Dale lay sound asleep beside me. I went into the kitchen, grabbed a pen and some paper, and sat down at the table. I wasn't really sure what I intended to write, but in a moment my pen began moving across the page. I wrote until my eyes drooped, then went back to bed, falling asleep immediately.

In the morning I reread what I'd written. I couldn't believe my eyes! It was the outline of a benevolence mission that would provide food and clothes to the needy. Beneath it I had made a list of congregations and pastors. I showed Dale the list. "How do you know all these names?" I shook my head. I didn't recognize a single one. We consulted a local phonebook—every pastor and congregation was there.

The next few weeks I went from church to church explaining what I planned to do. At first I felt shy about telling our strange story, but folks were supportive. Soon, we had a tiny storefront downtown. The first day we opened shop, we had nothing but a telephone, not even a sign on the door. "Have you ever heard of a benevolence mission with nothing to give away?" I asked. "The Lord brought us this far," Dale said. "I have a feeling he'll provide."

Sure enough, it wasn't long before a woman appeared at the door carrying a sack of clothes. "My kids have outgrown these," she said. "Y'all are welcome to 'em." We thanked her, and hadn't even had time to unpack them when another woman came in, two kids trailing her. The clothes fit them perfectly.

That was the beginning of Brighter Days Ministry, and we've grown quite a bit over the years. Sure, there are still tough moments, and sure, I still worry sometimes. But I have discovered my own personal key to faith. It's what people once said I couldn't do. I listen. G



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

A Greater Vision

There are many inspirational stories about career changes, but Richard Stearns never expected faith to lead him to World Vision.

By RICHARD STEARNS, BELLEVUE, WASHINGTON

WHEN THE PHONE rang in my office that morning, I had no idea how it would change my life.

I assumed it was a business call. In some sense it was. The caller was Bill Bryce, an old friend from church. "Hi, Rich," Bill said. There was something funny in his voice.

"Everything okay?" I asked.

"Oh, sure," he replied. He paused. "It's just that our president's leaving World Vision." Bill had moved away several years earlier to take a job raising money for World Vision, an international humanitarian organization. I was one of his first donors, but I still didn't know a whole lot about the organization.

Bill paused again. And then our phone call turned very weird. "Actually, that's why I'm calling," Bill continued. "I've been praying, Rich. And, um, the thing is, God told me you're going to be the next president of World Vision."

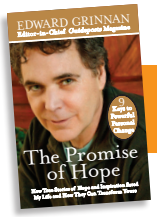
For a moment I was speechless. My eyes darted around my office. I was CEO of Lenox, one of the world's largest makers of fine china. I sat behind an imposing cherry wood desk at our headquarters near Princeton, New Jersey, surrounded by oil paintings and cabinets lined with elegant plates and teacups. A fountain splashed in a pond outside. A door led to my private bathroom. "You must be joking," I said to Bill.

Bill insisted he wasn't. "I know it sounds crazy," he said, "but I'm certain God spoke to me." He told me where to send my résumé.

"Bill!" I finally barked. "I'm not sending my résumé anywhere. I like my job. I don't know anything about international—whatever it is World Vision does. I'm not qualified, I'm not interested and I'm not available."

Bill was silent a moment. "Rich, you're not listening to God's plan."

Huh? That was almost rude! A few awkward moments later we hung up. Not listening to God's plan! I'd been listening for 25 years, ever since that day in business school when I fell to the floor and cried out, "My Lord and my God!" I'd been a hard-headed atheist before then.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

A Greater Vision

Coming from a dysfunctional family, I'd been determined to get a business degree, become a CEO and get rich. My girlfriend Reneé, a committed Christian, broke up with me when I told her I'd never follow her in faith. Then I started reading the Bible and other books on religion and philosophy.

Gradually I became convinced Jesus Christ really was God's son, and one day I committed my life to following him wherever he might lead. Everything afterward flowed from that decision. Reneé and I married and had five wonderful kids.

I climbed the corporate ladder, each rung an affirmation from God. We attended church regularly. Tithed. Participated in Bible studies. Supported missions.

The fruits of listening to God's plan were all around me. My job at Lenox. The private school where we sent the kids. Our 10-bedroom, 200-year-old farmhouse in Pennsylvania. My company Jaguar. Just recently I'd told Reneé we could afford to retire in less than a decade. How could I listen any more diligently?

BILL CALLED PERIODICALLY to update me on the World Vision search process. A colleague at Lenox even mentioned seeing an ad for the job in the *Wall Street Journal*. I shrugged it all off. Eventually, World Vision would find a president and the issue would go away.

One day my assistant buzzed to say a job recruiter was on the phone. Absently I told her to put him through. "Hello, Rich, I'm Rob Stevenson, a recruiter for World Vision. They're looking for a new president. Do you have a few minutes?"

A chill ran down my spine. "Did Bill Bryce put you up to this?"

"Bill who? No, I got your name from a list of World Vision donors."

I regained a bit of composure. The recruiter asked if I knew anyone who might be a good fit for the job. Relieved, I said, "You'd have to be part CEO, part Mother Teresa, part Indiana Jones. I don't know anyone like that. Sorry."

"What about you? You interested?"

"Me? Hey, I run a luxury goods company. I don't know anything about international relief and development."

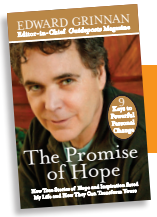
Rob persisted. "You're not going to believe this, but while we've been talking I've sensed the Holy Spirit telling me we ought to meet. I've talked to two hundred people so far. You're the first I've had this feeling about."

Whoa. I felt a stir of panic. I knew World Vision was a Christian organization. That was one of the reasons I gave them money. But this was unbelievable. "We don't need to meet," I said.

Rob paused. "Let me ask you a different question. Are you willing to be open to God's will for your life?"

I practically dropped the phone. This was becoming a dangerous conversation. "Of course I want to be open to God's will," I stammered. "But I'm pretty sure this isn't it—"

"Let's find out," Rob interrupted. "Have dinner with me."



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

A Greater Vision

That night I told Reneé about the latest encounter with World Vision. She said, "You never know what God might have in store. We need to be open to his leading."

I cringed. It was never a good sign when Reneé and I disagreed. Since our first impassioned discussions about faith all those years ago, she'd been setting the spiritual bar for our family.

There had to be a benign explanation for all these signs pointing to World Vision. I hadn't gone to business school to run a nonprofit! Obviously Reneé wasn't thinking about paying for the kids' college.

Rob must have enjoyed our dinner. To my chagrin I found myself on a shortlist for the World Vision job. I was interviewed along with three other finalists. I did everything I could to explain to the search committee why I was a terrible fit. Rob called the next day. "Congratulations! You got the job!"

FLABBERGASTED, I TOLD him I wanted to fly with Reneé to Seattle to visit World Vision's headquarters. "I'm not committing yet. I need to find out more. I need time to think!"

Rob arranged the trip and I spent the days leading up to it in agony. How had I gotten myself into this jam? I'd been trying to turn these people down for a year. Still they offered me the job! It fit no definition of God's plan I even remotely understood.

The very day I was to leave for Seattle a visitor arrived at my Lenox office. Keith, a successful tableware executive about 10 years older than me, said he was planning to buy an English china company and merge it with his own. "I'd like to hire you as CEO of the merged company," he said. "You'd get a ten-percent ownership stake worth about twenty-five to fifty million dollars."

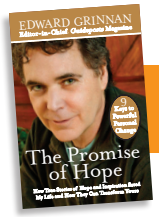
My jaw dropped. I stammered for a moment until I realized the only way to preserve my sanity was to tell Keith the truth. I explained I'd been offered a position leading a charity and wouldn't be able to consider his proposal until I'd dealt with the other job offer.

For a moment Keith seemed taken aback. Then a strange look came into his eyes. "That's really admirable of you," he said. "But you know, I think I understand." He launched into a story.

Years before, devastated over the sudden death of his 10-year-old daughter, he'd begun sponsoring a little girl in India. That simple act of helping another child had eased his grief like nothing else.

"The charity that put me in touch with her was absolutely wonderful," he said. "They're called World Vision. Whatever charity you're interviewing with, I'm sure they'll benefit from a man with your experience. I hope you'll take my offer. But I'll understand if you don't."

By the time Keith finished speaking I seemed to hear another voice, the same voice that had spoken to my good friend Bill Bryce and recruiter Rob Stevenson all those months be-



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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fore. I realized Reneé and I were witnessing something profound—God working directly in our lives, showing us, plain as day, that his plan for us involved something more amazing than I ever could have imagined.

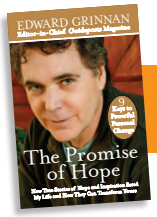
MY CORPORATE CAREER, my comfortable life, my safe and tidy church involvement—all of it was just prologue, maybe even a distraction from serving the Jesus I had committed my life to 25 years earlier. I knew then that if I truly wanted to follow that Jesus, I would have to follow the one who gave himself for the poor and dispossessed.

Rich, Jesus seemed to say, *you promised you'd follow me wherever I might lead. Will you follow me to the poor, to the refugee camps and to the garbage dumps where children scavenge for food? Will you follow me there, Rich?*

I'm embarrassed to say it took several more weeks and a lot more prayer before I finally gave in and became World Vision's president. Today, more than a decade later, I can hardly believe my agony over that decision.

Friends from our Lenox days still marvel at what Reneé, the kids and I gave up. I try to explain that corporate perks and Jaguars mean nothing after you've tasted the reward of doing the real work God always meant for you to do.

In the end, though, words fall short. *Follow me,* says God. And when we do, we find our deepest purpose and the true adventure begins. G



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Ryan's Miracle

Ryan White was just an average boy from a small midwestern city. But his short life left a lasting legacy in AIDS awareness.

By JEANNE WHITE-GINDER, CICERO, INDIANA

MY SON, RYAN White, died in 1990. Ryan, a hemophiliac, contracted a fatal illness from a type of blood product critical to people with hemophilia. But at the time no one realized that a new and deadly virus was then lurking in the nation's blood supply.

Ryan had just turned 13 when he was diagnosed in December 1984. I was a single mother. We lived in Kokomo, Indiana. Ryan had been born there, as had his younger sister, Andrea. So had I, and my ex-husband and my parents. My mom's big worry when I was growing up was that I might marry someone who would take me away from Kokomo. You weren't ever supposed to leave Kokomo. Kokomo took care of you. It was home. Then Ryan was diagnosed with AIDS.

When Ryan first became sick, we took him to the James Whitcomb Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis, where they discovered that Ryan had a rare form of pneumonia that usually indicates AIDS. But it was a few days before his physician, Dr. Martin Kleiman, knew for sure. I didn't want to tell Ryan until after Christmas. Ryan loved Christmas, and Dr. Kleiman couldn't guarantee that this wouldn't be Ryan's last.

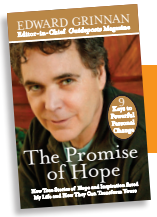
"The disease is so new, and so few children have it, that we just don't know how long Ryan can hang on," he explained.

Looking back, two incidents at Riley should have warned me of what was to come. First was a snatch of conversation in the cafeteria, a nurse speaking to a doctor: "I will not go into that boy's room," she insisted, trying to keep her voice low. "I don't care what they say about not being able to catch it; I'm not taking a chance." It wasn't just what she was saying. It was the hard edge of fear in her voice.

Then two of Ryan's favorite teachers from his middle school showed up to deliver a big batch of get-well wishes from his classmates. Though Ryan didn't know about his diagnosis yet, I thought it was time to tell his teachers. They paled and, fumbling, pushed the cards into my hands. "We shouldn't bother him," one of them said. Quick as that, they were gone. *Strange,* I mused, *they drove an hour to see Ryan, all the way from Kokomo.*

By Christmas Eve, Dr. Kleiman was able to take Ryan off the ventilator and removed his chest tube so he could talk again and celebrate Christmas. The day after, I told Ryan he had AIDS.

He didn't cry. He didn't even seem scared. He just wanted to know when he could go



Ryan's Miracle

back to school. "Mom, I want to get on with my life," he said.

Before I left his room that night I switched on a little plastic guardian angel that church friends from Kokomo had given us when Ryan was in and out of the hospital with hemophilia. It was just a battery-operated night-light, but Ryan always had it by his bed whenever he was hospitalized.

In the morning Ryan told me something incredible. "Mom," he said, matter-of-factly, "I saw Jesus last night."

I didn't know what to say.

"He told me that I had nothing to worry about," Ryan continued. "He promised he would take care of me."

"Ryan, what did Jesus look like?"

Ryan kind of smiled. "Well, he didn't look anything like that picture I have hanging in my room."

HE NEVER AGAIN mentioned the incident. But I thought of it often. I hoped it meant that God would work a miracle and cure Ryan. *Is that what you mean, Lord, by taking care of him? Are you going to give us a miracle?*

Ryan came home in February but missed the rest of the school year. By summer he was well enough to get a paper route and hang out with his friends. He began agitating to go back to school. Ryan could never play sports because of hemophilia, so he poured all his energy into his studies. He was desperate to go back. He was bored to death sitting around the house watching *I Love Lucy* reruns.

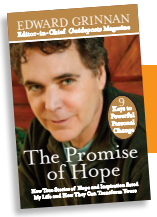
"All right," I said. "I'll tell them you're coming back in September." It wasn't going to be that easy.

The school board wouldn't let him back. Everybody was afraid. The board claimed it couldn't guarantee the health of Ryan's fellow students, despite overwhelming medical evidence that AIDS wasn't contracted through casual everyday contact. Finally a court forced the board to relent and Ryan returned to school.

But only for a day. A group of parents promptly brought suit to bar Ryan and he was sent home until arguments could be heard in court. Months dragged by. Eventually a judge affirmed Ryan's right to attend school. But by then, after more than a year of bitter legal combat in the center ring of a national media circus, the damage was done. Kokomo had hardened its heart against one of its own.

Still, Ryan was glad to be back; he even agreed to endure some completely unnecessary "precautions." He drank from a separate water fountain and used a separate bathroom. He ate with other students but was forced to use paper plates and disposable utensils. He wasn't allowed to take gym or use the locker room or pool.

Crazy rumors spread: that Ryan spat on food and tried to bite people. Parents didn't let their children associate with him. When he walked down the hall at school, kids ran away screaming. One day Ryan found his locker defaced with obscenities.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Ryan's Miracle

"Mom, are these people nuts?" he demanded. "I don't even know what half those words mean!" I knew how he felt. At my job with one of the huge auto plants in town, I was getting threatening anonymous notes attached to my time card.

Usually Ryan was able to shrug these things off. He was tough. He'd wanted to fight this fight. He'd always been more disgusted with the people who secretly supported him but were afraid to stand up than with those who openly attacked him. Now he worried about Andrea, his grandparents and me.

On Easter Sunday 1987 we were sitting in the back pew of our church—Ryan, Andrea, my parents and me—so Ryan's cough wouldn't upset people. When it came time for the traditional Easter greeting of peace, folks turned to the people in the pews behind them with a handshake and the words "Peace be with you." As the greeting rolled to the back of the church, I glanced over at Ryan. There he stood, gaunt, his growth stunted by AIDS at five feet, with his hand outstretched. But no one would shake his hand.

AFTERWARD, AS WE walked to my father's car, I cried out silently, *Lord, I thought you promised Ryan you would take care of him.* Every night Ryan and I had thanked God for another day. Now I wondered how much more my son could take. Ryan had been in and out of the hospital with the kind of illnesses that plague AIDS patients. He was on a medical roller coaster, and it was taking its cruel toll. Yet he held on. He had faith. Each time he was hospitalized, he brought his little plastic angel. But I was still waiting for a miracle.

The next Sunday, while we were at church, a bullet shattered our home's picture window. "Mom," Ryan announced, "it's time to get out of Kokomo."

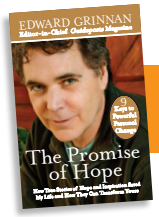
I dumped our house at a tremendous loss—everyone dubbed it the "AIDS house"—and we moved 20 miles south to a community called Cicero.

To our amazement, Ryan's new high school accepted him with open arms. The students themselves had decided to get together for AIDS awareness classes. They invited expert speakers and offered counseling to anyone who was afraid. The truth was, when the issue was left to the kids, they handled it much better than the adults.

Ryan's life had taken so many incredible turns. By now the whole country knew of his plight. He'd been on *Nightline* and the *Today* show and had made hundreds of new friends. He traveled the country speaking to people about AIDS. Everywhere, AIDS patients told Ryan the same thing—because of his public battle, Ryan had eased the way for them. "See, Mom," he said, "some good did come from that mess back in Kokomo."

I thought a lot about Kokomo. You don't just walk away from your hometown. I had family there. The local paper stood behind us, and our true friends never faltered. Ryan put it in perspective. "Look," he explained, "people were just doing what you were trying to do—watching out for their kids. They were scared to death, and that's why they acted so crazy. In a way, I really can't blame them—though they were wrong."

Ryan didn't have time to be bitter. He had forgiven. I prayed to find that same forgiveness.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Ryan's Miracle

In the spring of 1990 Ryan began slipping, and while we were in Los Angeles for an AIDS benefit, he became very ill. As soon as we got back to Indiana, Dr. Kleiman admitted him to Riley. Ryan knew it was bad. "I'm scared this time, Mom," he said. He was 18.

Over the next week Dr. Kleiman exhausted the medical options. Ryan's immune system was failing, and he slipped into unconsciousness. "Jeanne," Dr. Kleiman said, "I give him a 10 percent chance of making it. And the only reason I give him the 10 percent is because he's Ryan."

RYAN HAD ALWAYS said that when it got to this point, it would be harder for me than for him. Now I was afraid he was struggling to hold on to life for my sake. "Just let go, sweetheart," I whispered to him. "It's all right now."

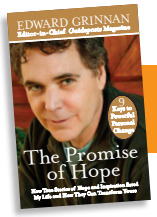
On Palm Sunday, 1990, Ryan let go. Like the day's last rays of sunlight, his breathing faded and then his heart stopped. Dr. Kleiman nodded. I leaned over and gave my son a last kiss. Then I reached for his guardian angel night-light and switched it off.

A week later, after the funeral, I put the angel on our mantel next to Ryan's high school picture. I stared at that angel, remembering how it had been given to us by our Kokomo friends so many years before. In Ryan's last week, word came through that the churches in Kokomo were praying for him. That was the Kokomo I wanted to remember.

And then, suddenly, looking at Ryan's angel, I knew that God had worked a miracle. He had taken care of Ryan. How else could Ryan have survived for nearly six years when the doctors had given him only six months? God chose Ryan, an average boy from an average town in Middle America, to do his work—to be an example in the face of ignorance and prejudice and fear, and to sow compassion in the heart of the nation.

Four years later, I still keep his angel on our mantel. Ryan has not been forgotten. The other day at the mall I noticed someone staring at me. A few seconds later she came over. "Of course," she said, "you're Ryan White's mother."

For the life of me, I can't think of anything better to have been.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

A Second Chance

She left home at 18, certain she'd never see her father again. Suddenly, she was caring for him like he'd never done for her.

By PATTY ROSE, LIVERMORE, CALIFORNIA

THE PHONE CALL came one cool winter day. It was the manager of the trailer park where my father lived. "Mrs. Rose, something is seriously wrong with your father," he said. "Would you come down here and check on him?"

It had been a long time since I'd seen my father, and I wasn't in any hurry to change that. I had left home years ago and never looked back. I married a good man and raised a wonderful daughter. I had my own life now—one that I had worked hard to build.

Ever since his divorce from my mom, my father had lived alone in a small trailer in Southern California, 500 miles away from me. The real distance between us seemed so much greater. Yet somehow I heard myself promise the manager, "Yes, I'll be there tomorrow."

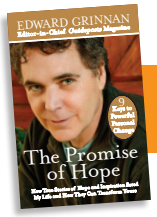
The whole drive down, memories flashed through my mind. Memories of the hurt I'd tried to put behind me. I remembered my father, the proud Marine, imposing military order on our household.

Making sure the first song I learned was the Marine Hymn. Snatching off the Christmas tree all the ornaments the rest of us had put up and rehanging them so there was exactly the same spacing between them. I remembered the battles he had with my mother and how their near-constant fighting was the soundtrack to my childhood.

I remembered longing to hear my father say just once, "I love you, Patty" only to have him yell at me, "You can't do anything right!" so many times I actually believed it. I remembered why I'd walked out the door at age 18, then left the area entirely in my late twenties, telling my dad, "I never want to see you again."

And now here I was standing outside his trailer, trying to work up the nerve to face him one more time. I knocked on the door, my hand, my whole body, shaking. No answer. Slowly I opened the door. I took a few steps inside and stopped, absolutely stunned.

My father was sitting on his sofa, looking confused and crying. This wasn't the angry, controlling man I had known growing up. This man was stooped and fragile and smelled like he hadn't taken a shower in weeks. He seemed broken somehow. Part of me felt sorry for him, but another part of me was thinking this was exactly the fate he deserved.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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I looked around. Everything was in disarray. Papers were stacked up everywhere. Rotting food sat on the counter. The stench was so sickening I had to go outside and get some fresh air. I stood on the porch, overwhelmed by what I'd just seen.

God, what am I supposed to do now? I wondered. But as soon as the words escaped me, a sense of sorrow overtook me, and I knew what I had to do. I went back inside and packed up some of my father's things. He was coming home with me.

Not permanently, mind you. I figured I'd take my father to the hospital, and the doctors would find out what was ailing him. I would have someone come in and clean out the trailer while he was getting medical treatment. As soon he recovered, I'd take him back there, and my life would return to normal. The sooner, the better, as far as I was concerned.

BUT THINGS DIDN'T go the way I planned. The hospital staff did a whole series of tests. Finally a doctor called me in and told me the diagnosis: Alzheimer's disease.

It didn't quite register at first. The doctor went on, listing the reasons they had come to this conclusion and explaining the likely progression of the disease. "At this stage, your father can no longer live on his own," the doctor continued. "He's going to need some assistance."

All of a sudden the reality of what he was saying hit me. I panicked. There had to be a mistake. "Isn't there some medicine for him to take so he can get better?" I asked. I'm sure he could hear the desperation in my voice. The doctor shook his head. He didn't have a lot of answers.

My heart sank. My father wasn't going home to Southern California. Not anytime soon. Not ever. He was my responsibility now.

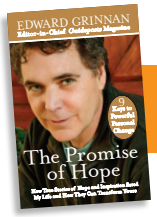
Back home, I told my husband the news. My dad would be staying on with us indefinitely. "It's okay, Patty," Dennis said. "We'll manage."

I wished I could believe that. Instead, my mind roiled. *How could God allow this to happen? Why was he asking me to take care of the man who never took care of me? It was the last thing in the world I wanted to do. This just wasn't fair.*

Fair or not, though, it was happening, and I had to learn how to deal with it. The physical tasks of caregiving—cooking for my father, helping him with shaving and bathing and dressing, keeping an eye on him so he didn't wander off into the road or accidentally hurt himself—those I managed to handle, with a lot of help from Dennis.

It was the emotional part I struggled with. The days of looking after my father turned into weeks, then months, and my resentment grew. Every night I battered God with complaints. "Why did you put this burden on me?" I demanded furiously. "Nothing's going to change. He's always going be the same hard-hearted man who made my childhood miserable."

Not that he had the ability to carry on long conversations, but I could hardly bring myself to say anything to my father beyond what was absolutely necessary for his care. The more forgetful and confused he became as the Alzheimer's progressed, the angrier I grew inside.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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One night I was putting my litany of complaints before God as usual. "He ruined my childhood. He was angry, bitter and hateful." Only this time the words reverberated in my head. Angry, bitter, hateful. Was I talking about my father? Or was I talking about me?

I tried to push the thought away, tried to remind myself of every hurtful thing my father had done to me growing up. But all I could think about was my own hard heart. "Oh, God, I am so sorry," I said. "I'm the one who's angry and bitter. I'm the one who's been acting hateful. Please help me. Help me change!"

Then it was as if the floodgates opened. All the pain, the conflicted feelings I'd been holding back over the years came rushing out. I sat there for I don't know how long, crying, talking to God, asking him to help me let go of the ugly feelings I had toward my father.

I didn't even have the words to explain everything, but I knew he heard me. Because when I was finished, I felt an incredible peace, as if every burden had been lifted from me. I wasn't angry at my father anymore. I wasn't bitter. Forgiveness had cleansed all that from me. For the first time, I was free. Free of the pain of my past. Free to start living the joyful life God wanted me to live.

AND THAT LIFE, I knew, included my father. From then on, I made a real effort to connect with him. The nature of Alzheimer's meant my dad would forget some very basic day-to-day things yet his memory of long-ago events remained as clear as a bell. So I asked him about his boyhood and his service as a young Marine in World War II. He had never talked about these things when I was growing up, and I began to understand why.

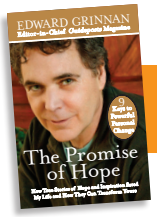
I discovered how Dad had been traumatized by war. I learned that he too had had a painful childhood. His father had taken his own life, and that loss was so inexplicable to him, Dad had never been able to get over it. When he told me about his father, Dad sounded so young and frightened and vulnerable. I took him into my arms and held him like he was a lost little boy.

To counterbalance all his painful memories, I told him about the many blessings in my life—my marriage to Dennis, my daughter and granddaughter.

I took Dad everywhere with me, to church, to ball games. I spent hours with him, just talking to him and holding his hand. Something truly wonderful was happening between us and I didn't want it to end. I only hoped that my father could feel it too. I could never tell what he understood with the Alzheimer's.

Until one day at dinnertime. I set his plate before him. Dad looked up at me. "Thank you for taking care of me," he said, the words coming slowly but clearly. "I love you, Patty."

It has been eight years since my father died. Now when I think of him, those are the moments I remember. Those moments of, as I put on Dad's headstone, God's amazing grace. G



The Trade

When Tommy Herr was traded to another team, he felt like his career was over. God had another plan.

By TOMMY HERR, LANCASTER PENNSYLVANIA

I STILL DON'T BELIEVE it.

Friday night, April 22, 1988. Busch Stadium. I'm in total shock. I'm sitting here in front of my locker in a nearly empty Cardinal clubhouse, half in and half out of my white home uniform with the famous St. Louis redbirds across the front. There are lots of surprises in life, and especially in baseball, but this is not one I saw coming. No way.

Earlier this evening we dropped a close game to the New York Mets, our archrivals in the National League's tough Eastern Division. I came off the field feeling tired and a bit discouraged. It's funny how much more tired you feel when you've lost. The hit I'd managed off Mets ace Ron Darling looked like a meager accomplishment in the face of our defeat.

Well, we'd just have to go out and get 'em tomorrow. Or so I thought. As I was brooding on our loss—and the Cards' slow start, someone tapped me on the shoulder. "Whitey wants to see ya."

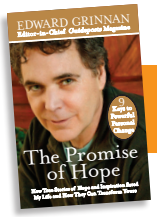
"Whitey" is Whitey Herzog, the legendary manager of the Cards and one of the shrewdest minds in baseball. I've played for Whitey my entire major league career, and being summoned to his office is still a little like being called into your dad's study as a kid. Not everyone likes Whitey, but everyone respects him. I think he's terrific. He's taught me most of what I know about playing major league ball, transforming a shy kid from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, into an all-star second baseman with some pop in his bat and some speed on the bases. I've played in three World Series for Whitey and the Cards. I've always considered it a great honor to wear the St. Louis uniform.

Wonder what Skip wants, I mused wearily, making my way to the cramped little office behind a wall of lockers. Maybe a pep talk, though why, when I was having one of my hottest starts ever, a nine-game hitting streak and hitting safely in 11 of 12 games. Still, none of that mattered if we weren't winning.

As soon as I stepped through the door I knew something big was up. General manager Dal Maxvill was standing behind Whitey, who was seated at his desk.

"Sit down, Tom," said Whitey, pointing to a chair and running his hand across the snow-white brush cut for which he is nicknamed. Dal dosed the door quietly behind me as I lowered myself into the chair. I looked at Whitey and then at Dal questioningly. I felt my stomach start to churn. *Oh, no,* I thought. *Not me!*

"Tommy," Whitey began in a tired, even tone, planting his elbows on the cluttered desktop and leaning forward, "you've been a fine player for me for nearly eight seasons. You've given



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

The Trade

the Cards everything we've asked of you. But…"

That "but" stopped my heart.

"But," said Whitey, drawing a deep breath, "we've traded you to the Twins for Tom Brunansky."

For an instant, time seemed to stand still. I kept trying to define and redefine the word trade in my head. I knew exactly what it meant: to exchange, to swap, to get rid of. I just wanted it to mean something different this one time. I wanted to make believe I was being asked my opinion of such a wild idea, not being told that it was a done deal.

DAL TOOK OVER, earnestly trying to explain why the move was good for both the players and their teams, and how the Cards desperately needed a power-hitting right fielder like Brunansky. I didn't hear most of what was being said. Whitey folded his arms across his chest and stared down at the clutter. My eyes rested on a picture on the wall behind him—my picture—hanging along with some of the other veterans of pennant-winning and world-championship Cardinal teams: shortstop Ozzie Smith, pitcher Bob Forsch, outfielder Willie McGee. I wondered if Whitey would take down my picture now.

"…the Twins, of course, will contact your agent about your contract…"

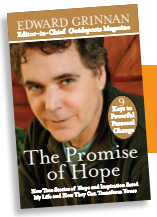
I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to believe it: no longer a Cardinal. I'd started my career here. I'd expected to finish it in St. Louis as well. I was in my prime as a ballplayer. Thirty-two years old. What about my friends on the team? Our locker-room Bible study group? Why? Why didn't Whitey and the Cards want me anymore?

"I think you understand management's position." Dal was winding up. "The Twins would like you to report in time for tomorrow night's game against the Cleveland Indians in Minneapolis. Good luck, Tom."

I just wanted to get out of that office. Be by myself. Lick my wounds. Whitey was looking at me blankly. What emotions was he masking? I knew this wasn't easy for him either. Almost as if in slow-motion replay, he stretched out his hand to mine. A dozen thoughts swirled in my head. *How would I break the news to Kim and the kids back home in Lancaster? To my folks? What would I do with our condominium in St. Louis? Where would I live in Minneapolis? I didn't know a soul there. How could I play baseball in anything other than a Cardinal uniform?*

When I walked out of the skipper's office a media horde was waiting. Amazing how news travels. I faced them in a daze. They posed all the expected questions: Are you sorry to leave St. Louis? (Yes.) Will you like playing for the Twins? (I hope so.) Are you bitter at the Cards, Tommy? (A little bit, I'm afraid, but I'm trying to understand.) Private moments can be so public when you're a professional athlete.

So here I am, sitting listlessly in front of my locker. I mean, my former locker. Number 28. It's nearly midnight. Everyone's gone home. I'd better get moving. I start to pull off my red stirrup socks and the rest of my Cardinal uniform. It will be for the last time. It hurts.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

The Trade

Saturday morning. Here I am on the plane to Minneapolis. The flight is bumpy and seems long. I try to nap, unsuccessfully. I can't get last night out of my head. The first thing I did after talking with Whitey and the press on Friday was call Kim back home in Lancaster. She and the boys, Aaron, seven, and Jordan, two, were planning to come to St. Louis for the season after school let out.

"Kim, we've been traded." *Pause*. I could sense her shock through the wire. Kim started to cry softly. When a ballplayer is traded, his family is traded along with him. Kim was thinking about the other Cardinal wives she'd have to say goodbye to, their prayer group she'd helped start. Baseball wives feel like teammates. They form many of the same bonds and alliances among themselves as their husbands do in the clubhouse. Sometimes a trade is harder on a wife than on the player.

"We're going to Minnesota."

"Well," Kim replied, catching her breath, "I know this must be God's will, Tommy."

I KNOW IT TOO, but that isn't helping me much with the human side of things. I know I am part of God's great plan, a plan that is infinitely more important than the little twists and turns in my baseball career, but my ego has taken a major broadside. All my life I've triumphed at sports. Back in Lancaster at Hempfield High I starred in track, baseball, basketball, football. You name it. If you could kick it, throw it, bat it, catch it or run after it, I was good. I was blessed. I signed with the Cards right out of school, and in a few years I was playing in the bigs. I'm not accustomed to being told to pack my bags. I'm always the guy everyone wants…

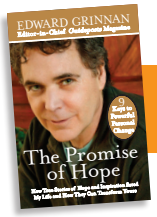
Saturday night. It's late. My first game as a Twin was a disaster. I got to the park from the airport a few minutes before batting practice, just enough time to climb into the uniform waiting for me and shake a few hands. Veteran pitcher Bert Blyleven has my old Cardinal number, 28, so I had to settle for another. I was given 33. Interesting. A change in number didn't inspire me, though. I went 0-for-4 at the plate and we lost to a streaking Cleveland.

Here in my room at a Holiday Inn near the Metrodome I am restless. Sleep is impossible. I page through my Bible, but concentration is elusive. I'm reading Romans but thinking about Busch Stadium—I realize that all the truth I need is contained right here in this Book, but I just can't seem to get my sense of rejection pushed out of the way. I call Kim. Aaron gets on the phone. He's crying.

"Daddy, why aren't you a Cardinal anymore?"

Sunday. Another fruitless day at the plate, another sleepless night in my hotel room. Will things ever get better?

Tuesday. I'm feeling desperate. I'm batting .000 in the American League. I couldn't even get a hit tonight in the series opener against lowly Baltimore, which is mired in the worst losing skid in league history. I try to force myself to sleep but just end up tossing and turning.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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Finally I get out of bed and pick up the Word again. What would the ancient Hebrews have thought of baseball? Of batting averages and trades? Well, there was Joseph. Joseph was traded. Traded by his brothers for 20 shekels. Imagine how he must have felt. At least I was traded for someone of equal value; I certainly wasn't a slave. Joseph too lost something he wore proudly, perhaps too proudly, his many-colored coat, just as I lost my Cardinal uniform. And I guess you can say I felt as if I had been cast into a pit of sorts: I mean, the enclosed Metrodome is hardly the grand open-air ballpark that Busch Stadium is.

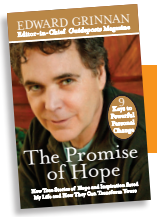
JOSEPH'S STORY LIFTS me. I see how he turns his rejection into triumph and learns a lesson in humility and forgiveness. But first Joseph has to face up to his rejection, accept it as a fact of life. We all face rejection at one time or another. The greatest rejection of all was Christ's crucifixion upon the cross. He was traded for 30 pieces of silver. What is my infinitesimal suffering compared to that? My sense of loss compared to his? Christ triumphed over rejection by rising from the dead. We too must triumph over rejection in our daily lives. Rejection, the Bible tells me, is a prelude to triumph.

Wednesday. Tonight I got a hit. Finally. Four, in fact. I felt as if a huge weight lifted. The guys in our dugout practically gave me a standing ovation. And I'm feeling more comfortable at second base in the Dome. It's a pretty good park after all. Getting to know my new teammates helps too. As it turns out, shortstop Greg Gagne, my partner on double plays, is a Christian.

Maybe things are falling into place, I'm beginning to like the Twin Cities. The fans are incredible. Today I got a call from a local Christian group welcoming me to Minnesota. It still hurts a little to think about the trade. But dwelling on rejection (the Cards don't want me and all that) is no good. I've got to get over it and go to work on the baseball diamond like the veteran I am. In this game your time in the sun is very short. You might as well relax and enjoy it. Besides, Kim pointed out something important: The Twins gave up a good player because they wanted me. I hadn't thought much about that. I can see now that the trade wasn't personal. Baseball is a business as well as a sport, and the Cards' decision was a business decision, an even exchange, one good player for another.

Another thing. In '85 when the Cards won the National League Championship, there was a pretty active group of us Christians on the club. In the last few years we've kind of dispersed. Ricky Hotton pitches for the White Sox. Andy Van Slyke went to Pittsburgh. Todd Worrell is still a Card. You know, maybe God is scattering us the way He scattered the first apostles to spread the Word.

I could get traded again any day now. Baseball isn't permanent. But my Christianity is. That's the important part. You don't get traded off God's team. Everyone's a starter.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Renaissance Man

A man looking for work finds it in an unexpected place—at a Renaissance Faire!

By JAMES SCHWENK, MYERSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

I WAS BLESSED WITH three passions in life: history, teaching and religion.

I came from a faithful family of educators—Dad, my brother, both sisters. So to say that my professorship in history at Evangelical Theological Seminary in the rolling green hills of southeastern Pennsylvania was my dream job would be the understatement of a lifetime. It felt more like the familiar and assuring hand of the Lord guiding me on the path I'd been destined to follow.

Surely, then, you wouldn't blame me for wondering how on earth I came to be dressed in tights, coarse tunic and feathered cap, uttering things like, "Hark, yon Dumpster is full!" while two actors dressed as medieval knights staged a sword fight over the rights to a fair maiden, herself a recently unemployed waitress.

But you would be just as surprised to discover how I learned that this job seems as much an answer to prayer as any job I've ever had, and in some ways more so.

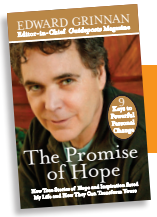
Excuse me just a moment here while I change yonder lightbulb at the ticket booth to our Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire. We've got to see to be able to collect the ducats at the entry gate. There.

What got me to this place in life was a shocker of a conversation I had several months before with the dean of faculty in his quiet, wood-paneled office, the walls lined with book after revered book. I thought we'd be discussing my curriculum proposal for the upcoming semester. In fact, I launched right into it.

The dean stopped me. "James, you understand the financial challenges that this seminary faces. It's dire. We have to make moves no one really wants to make. Yet make them we must. As of July first your full-time position will be eliminated."

Shock stretches time. I felt like I sat there for hours in dead silence, but it was only a couple of minutes. I'd been a professor for 10 terrific years. My family was just about to move into a new house. Losing your job, they say, is second only to the trauma of losing a loved one. To me, it felt like attending my own funeral.

"James, you were a good teacher, and the faculty and students all loved you; it's just that..." It sounded so eulogistic, like I was being lowered into my professional grave. The economy was bad. Schools were hurting. If I couldn't hang on to the job I was perfect for, what prospects did I have?



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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That night I sat with my wife at the kitchen table. Lore had recently been let go from her job as a receptionist. In a very short time we had gone from being a two-income family with two kids to a no-income family and a new house to pay for.

"Why would God take away the job he led me to?" I asked.

Lore just shook her head and reached for my hand. "We don't always know his full plan for us," she said. Still, I could see the deep worry in her eyes.

Bills piled up. Our savings dipped rapidly. It felt like we were being sucked into some terrible financial black hole, the gravity of our obligations so much greater than our strength to meet them. I was scheduled to give a paper at an international conference of C. S. Lewis scholars. How could I afford to do that?

Now that school was out, all four of us were on the job hunt—Lore, our 16-year-old-son, Tyler, and Heather, our 19-year-old. We were willing to take just about anything. I'd worked construction in grad school—and enjoyed it—but nobody was building in this economy.

ONE MORNING I drove Tyler to apply for a summer job at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire—a touristy re-creation of a sixteenth-century English village with all the employees in period costume and character.

Tyler was psyched. He'd caught the acting bug at school that year. "This could be really cool, Dad."

I sat in a room full of applicants while Tyler went in for his interview. By now it felt so dismally routine. Folks hunched over forms, checking their crib sheets of references and former employers.

I stared out the window hoping for some relief. I'd filled out so many job applications I didn't think I could bear to look at another one. I focused on the mock Elizabethan architecture of the village.

Humph, the historian in me thought, then grudgingly admitted, *Not bad*. I looked some more. For the first time since I lost my job I felt something come alive inside me—a sense of familiarity.

For an historian the past feels familiar, sometimes even more so than the present. Here was an attempt to bring history into the present. It wasn't a college, but it was a place people learned about the past, about their heritage, a kind of classroom in its own right.

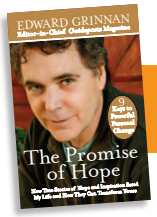
I had another sense of familiarity as well—that assuring hand leading me.

I filled out an application and saw an interviewer. "I could be a greeter," I offered. I'd already decided that would be the perfect fit for me. She glanced at my application again, probably noted that I was married and had lost a good job.

"There's better money in maintenance," she said.

It took me just an instant to consider the fact that I would be a maintenance man decked out in a period costume spouting quasi-authentic middle-English verbiage whilst wielding-eth a broom and dustpan. And I wouldn't be making anything near what I used to make or be called professor.

Again that shock-induced slowing of time. The interviewer sat with her pen poised above my



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Renaissance Man

application. I felt my head start to nod. It was only for a couple months. *All right, Lord. This must be where you want me right now.*

"When do I start?" I asked.

The couple of days before I started at the Faire I spent painting the bedrooms of our new house. There was a therapeutic comfort in the smooth application of the paint, the soft swish of the roller as it transformed bare walls.

What do we really learn from history? I wondered. *Why was I so comfortable with it? Teaching it?* The future was unknown and unknowable, therefore unteachable. Or was it? Of all the knowledge I'd gained, I asked myself, what was the most essential?

Faith.

Faith connects the past to the future, like a kind of spiritual gravity. What I knew—knew with the utter certainty of anything I'd ever known—is that God is in the future as fully as he was in the past or in the present, in the moment and the smallest division of the moment, present in the very color of the paint I was putting on the walls.

GOD WAS EVERYWHERE in all of time and would be with me and my family today, tomorrow and forever. The greatest history lesson I could know was to trust him always, especially when faced with the unknowable.

That doesn't mean my first day at the Faire was a total breeze. *Who am I kidding?* I caught myself thinking. I mean, you'd have to be a pretty amazing middle-aged guy not to be a little self-conscious parading around in public in tights and a feathered cap, sweeping up yonder hot dog wrapper.

The first time a little girl looked up at me quizzically—not unlike some students I've had—I doffed my cap, bowed and gave forth with a convincing, "Good morrow m'lady!" It felt good.

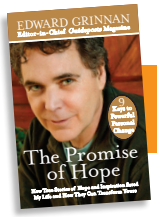
I took a lunch break with some of the actors. Pretty soon we were talking about Shakespeare, the Elizabethan theatre and the political intrigue of the times (then, not now). It wasn't all that different from sitting in the faculty lounge.

Later, taking a coffee break, I watched the dancers perform. I mean, what job entertains you like that on your break?

Guess what? We all landed jobs at the Renaissance Faire that summer. Tyler was hired on as a maintenance man, Heather, a greeter and Lore took tickets. By the end of the season we were practically heartbroken that this amazing and magical time was over. Some of the workers would head south to join other Renaissance faires. But we would stay. Tyler and Heather were returning to school and Lore had a line on a promising job in town.

Oh, and me. I was offered a permanent position—at the Faire, maintaining the historic architecture year round, doing painting and carpentry and electrical work, work that I know and enjoy. I do a little teaching too. I picked up a couple of classes back at the seminary.

I try not to worry too much about the future—and I'm getting better at it. I'm comfortable knowing I'm meant to be where I am now. And where I'm led next, that will be the most interesting history lesson of all.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Voices

Lionel Aldridge, star player for the Green Bay Packers, battled his way through paranoid schizophrenia with the help of a little faith.

By LIONEL ALDRIDGE, MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN

ONE OF THE most frightening signs that there was something seriously wrong with me were the voices I began hearing in 1974.

At first they were just stray, nagging worries that dogged me through the day, self-doubts that we all have from time to time. They seemed to rise up out of nowhere—vague thoughts with an accusing edge: *You really don't work very hard, do you?* Or I'd be alone in my car and it was as if I overheard someone whisper, *Everyone knows Lionel Aldridge doesn't care about his job.*

The fact was I worked hard and cared very much about my job. I was something of a fixture on the Milwaukee scene. After an all-pro career as a defensive end with coach Vince Lombardi's two-time Super Bowl champion Green Bay Packers football team, I'd moved easily into the role of NFL commentator and local TV sports anchor. I had a successful, high-profile life.

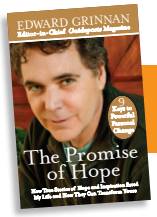
That was before the voices.

The voices were very scary and confusing. I didn't know what to do. I didn't want anyone to find out the terrible things happening inside my head. As an athlete I'd been trained to be tough; it was not my nature to seek help. I wanted to be strong.

At first I tried to ignore them. *I was just going through a bad period,* I thought. But the voices grew more belittling and threatening, more real. I'd be standing in front of the mirror shaving when I'd hear from the next room, *You don't take very good care of your family.* "That's bull!" I'd shout. I'd search the house for my tormentor. "How'd he get in here?" I'd mutter, as my wife, Viki, shook her head in dismay. There never was any intruder.

If a co-worker at the station didn't smile at me in the morning, a voice would hiss, *See? He doesn't think much of you either. He knows you don't deserve your job.* I became hard to get along with. I started talking back to the voices, bickering and pleading and cursing. I am a large and imposing man; it must have scared folks half out of their wits to see me shouting at people who weren't there.

Rumors flew around town that I was on drugs. That was completely false, but I was in no shape to prove otherwise. I was getting worse. People wanted to help but they didn't know how. "He's under a lot of pressure," I heard them say.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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One night, attending a Bucks basketball game with a friend, I froze with terror as we moved in front of the crowd toward our courtside VIP seats.

"What's wrong?" my friend asked.

"These people," I stammered, "they…they know everything I'm thinking. They're all watching me."

I was dizzy with panic. I wanted to run.

"Take it easy," my puzzled friend whispered, looking at me as if he suspected I was playing a gag on him. Then he saw the perspiration drenching my shirt collar. "Maybe you're working too hard," he muttered, putting an arm on my shoulder and easing me into my seat.

SOON THAT FEELING of being watched wouldn't let up, even on the air. Looking into the camera, I could barely hold my composure as I reported the nightly sports scores. The wide camera lens zooming in on me was a glistening, all-seeing eye that could plumb the farthest, most hidden reaches of my soul. Everyone who was watching on their TV sets, I was convinced, could see right inside my brain, where laid bare for all to look on in disgust were the grimmest secrets of my life.

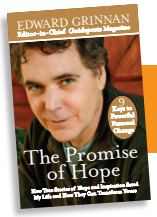
I was sure there was a far-flung conspiracy to destroy me. I fought with total strangers on the street. I separated from Viki and our two daughters, and eventually divorced. I lost my job and my friends. There was nothing left but the voices shouting in my head, as real to me as an opposing 260-pound pulling guard on a goal line stand back in my playing days. My life spun out of control.

One night the voices commanded me to start driving. I didn't want to leave Milwaukee. It had been my home for so many good years, and a part of me still understood
that I needed a home now more than ever. But my state of extreme delusion robbed me of choice.

I hastily packed up the car with some old clothes and a few basics. Almost as an afterthought I threw in a Bible I'd owned since the Packers. I used to take it with me when I traveled with the team. Even now I'd read it to try and drown out the voices. What little relief I could get sometimes came from immersing myself in that old Bible.

I started to drive with no map or plan—I just filled up on gas and went. I tried to turn back; I couldn't do it.

I crisscrossed the country in a wilderness of interstates. At first I slept in hotels, then motels, then flophouses. I went to Chicago, Kansas City, Dallas, Sacramento, Las Vegas. My funds evaporated and my credit cards were cancelled, so I started living in the car, occasionally washing dishes for food and gas. In Florida I ditched the car for a hundred dollars and hit the streets with just a battered satchel on my shoulder.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

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Occasionally I hung around a town for a while doing odd jobs, living on the streets and eating at soup kitchens. Quite naturally, people would stare at me, and that would only make my delusions of persecution worse. I never held a job for long. What could you do about a menial laborer who marched and sang for no reason and jabbered at people who were 2,000 miles away? Had I seen such a man on the street in Milwaukee only a few years before, I would have shaken my head sadly and crossed to the other side.

I'd become one of those lost, devastated souls. There were a lot of them out there with me, crippled by mental illness, but as I wandered the country I was only aware of my own haunted, unhappy world a million miles from the life I once had.

One night I slept in a field off an interstate near the Great Salt Lake. I didn't notice when I woke up, but while I was sleeping my jewel-encrusted Super Bowl ring must have slipped off. Those rings are not easy to come by, and I'd hung on to mine as a kind of symbol of who I'd once been. No one ever questioned me about it. I guess they thought it was just some crazy piece of jewelry that a crazy man wore.

I DIDN'T THINK ABOUT the Packers much anymore, and when I discovered the ring missing, it was as if I'd been stripped of one final link with my past. I sat in the middle of a sidewalk and wept into my hands.

It wasn't long afterward that I was gripped by a gruesome hallucination. I was hanging on a cross, like Jesus. Standing in a roadside ditch under a hot white cloudless Utah sky, legs together and arms outstretched, I vividly experienced my own crucifixion. It is hard to explain now, but in my tortured imagination I actually believed that I was living out the event. It seemed so absolutely real.

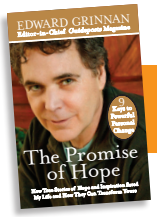
I remained that way for hours. People shouted from cars whizzing by on the desert highway. A few threw objects at me. But I was anchored to that spot, fully convinced that I could be seen hanging on a cross and no one cared.

"Help me!" I cried out, the sweat and tears streaking my dust-caked face. "Help! I'll accept help from anyone."

That night, exhausted and hungry, I huddled beside a bridge and read my battered Bible, the only thing left now from my old life. I still had moments when I could dimly perceive reality. A core part of me knew that I must get well. But that clarity was fleeting, and my madness always took me back in circles and filled me with hurt and fear.

I was reading Paul when I came across a passage that stopped me: "Earnestly seek the higher gifts." I'd been taught that these gifts were spiritual, given by God to lift us up. Were they still there for me? I wondered what gift could be found in the demented chorus that chased me across the country. Those voices were so angry and critical.

Yet didn't I know all along that there was one voice with me my whole life, a flowing, wordless voice that said, *You are loved*? It was the voice of God, a voice for all of us to hear in our own way. I'd never stopped believing in God, but His voice had



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

Voices

been drowned out by my illness. When I stopped long enough to listen, I knew that with God I had hope, I had love. That was what Paul was talking about.

Eventually I wandered back to Milwaukee. The voices still besieged me. I lived on the streets. Being back brought me in contact with old friends. I was ashamed for them to see what I'd come to. I tried to hide. Yet for some reason I'd come back here. I knew that.

Finally, through the repeated intervention of people I'd known for a long time, I was committed to a hospital. I didn't want to go in—I thought it was all part of the big conspiracy. Commitment is difficult legally, and I made it harder. Yet it marked the start of the road back.

I learned that I had paranoid schizophrenia, a physical disease that affects the mind. Hearing voices was one of the symptoms. Slowly the doctors hit upon some drugs that helped. Little by little my condition improved, the voices gradually subsided.

AT FIRST IT was horrifying. It was an awful thing to face, like seeing a crazy man on the street and suddenly realizing that you are looking into a mirror. One day during therapy, I begged the doctor to show me one person who'd recovered from paranoid schizophrenia.

"Well, Lionel," he replied, "statistically many people do recover partially, even fully." He went to quote all the facts and figures.

"No," I interrupted, "I want to actually meet someone who's beat it."

There was no one to show me. People who recover from mental illness rarely divulge that devastating stigma. It would have helped me to see someone who'd come back. "If I get out of here, Doc," I promised him, "I'm going to make a point of talking about it."

I did recover. Not without setbacks and relapses, not without moments when I thought I could never again face life, but I did get well with the help of friends, doctors who found the right medication to help me and the voice of a loving God.

I discovered new strategies to cope with the world. For a while, symptoms sometimes came back. Like one night after I got out of the hospital. I was walking up to a cafe near my apartment for dinner when suddenly I knew that every patron inside was saying terrible things about me. I stood at the door, terrified, my heart pounding. I was about to run home and lock myself in when I thought, *No, you've got to do this. You've got to go inside and face these people.*

Still I was convinced they were all talking about me. Well, I figured, maybe they're saying good things like, "Hey, there's Lionel Aldridge. He used to play for the Packers and then he got sick. Look how good he's doing now." If people really were saying bad things about me, I would have to forgive them. Forgiveness made what they said harmless; it didn't matter whether it was real or imagined.

I went inside, sat down and ordered my dinner. The room was alive with chatter. I was almost too nervous to eat. Then slowly it dawned that these people were talking

Voices

about everything in the world except me.

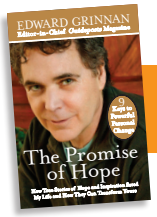
It worked. From then on when I thought strangers were talking about me, I always convinced myself that they were saying good things, or forgave them for the bad things I imagined them saying. And through the whole process I never stopped asking God's help or listening for his voice.

In time the voices went away. I still see a doctor and take my medication, like anyone with a serious illness, but I am well again, well enough to keep a promise. Today I travel the country speaking to groups about mental illness and recovery. It's vital for patients, families and even doctors to see someone who's actually made it back.

In January 1985, the anniversary of the Packers' first Super Bowl win 18 years before, I got a card in the mail from a bunch of my old teammates. They'd gotten together and commissioned an exact copy of the missing victory ring to give to me.

I knew that day that I had returned. Even when you think you've lost everything in your life, there is always hope of finding a way back, sometimes to an even better place.

I found my way, with the loving voice of God to guide me.



THE PROMISE OF HOPE

At His Side

After a serious injury in Iraq, this soldier needed his wife. Her inspiring story shows the strength it took to help him heal.

By TONIA SARGENT, OCEANSIDE, CALIFORNIA

SINCE THE IRAQ war began eight years ago, more than 30,000 American servicemen and women—including my husband, Kenny, a Marine master sergeant—have been wounded. In one sense, that's actually a hopeful number. Battlefield medics these days are so skilled they're saving soldiers who, in any other war, would've died.

That's what happened to Kenny. During a firefight in Najaf a bullet ricocheted off an armored personnel carrier and pierced his head, entering under his right eye and exiting the left side of his skull. Medics kept him alive long enough to fly to a Baghdad military hospital. In a matter of days he was on his way to America.

Unfortunately, that's not where the story ends. Not for Kenny, not for anyone else with war wounds, especially the thousands suffering what has become Iraq's signature injury, traumatic brain damage. For those warriors and their families, a battlefield injury is like the start of a whole new war—not only to heal, but to navigate an often overwhelmed military medical system.

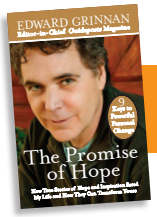
That, too, is what happened to Kenny—and to me. Up to the day Kenny was wounded I was what you could call a typical Marine wife. After—well, let's just say I've discovered a fighting strength I never knew I had.

I first began to realize what we were up against the day Kenny arrived at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Maryland. It was five days after his injury and I was frantic. The only information I'd had came from patchy cell phone calls to officers and doctors in Iraq.

I'd had to drop everything—I taught aerobics at a YMCA near Camp Pendleton, where we lived with our two teenagers, Tasha and Alishia—figure out who would take care of the girls and board a red-eye to Maryland. I'd even had to put off seeing Kenny to fill out a financial hardship application to afford the rooming house provided for relatives of the wounded.

When I got upstairs to the intensive-care unit I saw a bank of monitors near the nurses' station. One, identified by Kenny's Social Security number, glowed with an X ray of a shattered skull. I drew a sharp breath and asked for the room number. I was starting down the hall when a doctor grabbed my arm. "Ma'am, why don't you sit here first and let me brief you on his injuries."

I stared at the doctor, incredulous. What could possibly be more soothing to Kenny than



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the loving presence of his wife? "I'm sorry," I said. "He needs me. I don't care how bad he looks. I've been waiting five days to see him and I'm going to his room right now."

The doctor let go of my arm and I hurried to Kenny's room. I paused at the door to compose myself then walked in. I didn't recognize him. His head was swollen and disfigured, marked with dried blood and rows of staples. He lay passively, hooked to massive machines.

"Kenny, it's me," I said softly, trying not to cry. "Squeeze my hand if you know who I am." His head didn't move. But he squeezed my hand.

THE FOLLOWING WEEKS I discovered that the disorienting experiences of those first days were only the beginning. Kenny and I had met in high school, married young, and for the next 17 years, raised our girls on bases around the country.

We knew a lot about being a Marine family. But nothing had prepared me for all the paperwork, decisions and medical terminology that came at us. I didn't go to college and had no medical or legal training. I had to rely on my wits every time I was asked to sign something.

Early on I was presented with documents that would have retired Kenny from active duty, transferring his care to the Veterans Administration. I didn't know exactly what that meant. But something about it seemed wrong. Didn't they think he would get better? I didn't sign the papers.

I soon realized I had to be equally vigilant about Kenny's care. His injury had left him with near-total amnesia and great difficulty speaking. Doctors and therapists worked hard with him. Some were incredibly dedicated. But there were many patients on the ward, and the staff was pulled in many directions.

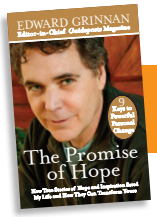
Sometimes, doctors even had to accompany politicians and other VIPs touring the floor to visit wounded soldiers. As soon as they left I returned to a routine I'd developed. I got Kenny out of bed, washed him, took him around the ward and pointed out rooms with other Marines.

No subject got him talking like his fellow Marines. The week's highlight was Sunday phone calls from the 15 men he'd commanded in Iraq. That, or me renting movies or talking about Tasha and Alishia.

As weeks went by I felt more confident. I learned every aspect of Kenny's care, to the point I could do it when nurses weren't available. I learned enough medical terms to talk knowledgeably with doctors—me, an aerobics teacher!

And I got savvy enough to request a copy of every piece of paper added to Kenny's medical record. When a new doctor or therapist came in asking Kenny questions he'd answered a thousand times before—or couldn't answer at all—I pulled out my records and pointed straight to the information.

Just as I was getting the hang of things, Kenny was transferred to a VA rehabilitation hospital in Palo Alto, California. We were flown in a military transport plane. I had just



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gotten him settled into his room when a nurse said, "Visiting hours are from 1 to 7 p.m."

I looked at her, surprised. "I'm sorry, I'm not a visitor. I'm Sgt. Sargent's wife and have been at his bedside for the last month. He has amnesia. I assumed I'd be sleeping here."

"Ma'am, here's a list of nearby hotels." As I left, I saw Kenny's eyes widen with fear. I spent an anxious, maddening night at the Hometel, a place for vets to stay during hospital procedures. Not even prayer brought clear answers. My thoughts kept drifting back to myself, to the struggles we'd already been through. It was as if God were saying, *Stay strong, Tonia.*

At the hospital the next day, I found Kenny still looking terrified. I paged the nurse. "I don't mean to be a nuisance," I said, "but there has to be some way for me to stay with my husband. This is a whole new environment for him. I'm the only one he recognizes. What can I do?"

"You can visit during visiting hours."

A neuropsychologist came in. "Ma'am," she said, and her voice sounded tired, as if she had a job to do and I was making it harder, "this is your husband's rehabilitation, not yours. It would be better if you left the work to us. Think of him as being away on a deployment."

I LOOKED AT HER, at the nurse. They showed no signs of yielding. Disappointment and anger came over me. What could I do to make them understand? Kenny was better because I'd helped with his care. I glanced at Kenny. His eyes were still frightened.

But I saw something else in them too. A glimmer of fight. A glimmer of Kenny, the proud Marine. I thought about myself, a Marine wife. What did that mean? Well, more than I used to think it did. I had mastered one hospital. Kenny and I had come this far.

Now was not the time to back down. *Stay strong, Tonia.* I took a deep breath. "I am going to be by my husband's side. If you won't help me do that, I'll find someone who will," I said. And that's what I did. I contacted the local Marine Corps Reserve unit.

I pulled out business cards I'd collected from VIP visitors to Bethesda and called congressional offices. I signed up as a hospital volunteer, giving me no restricted visiting hours. And I offered to help the hospital raise money to build more housing for patients' loved ones. In short, I became an advocate. I went to war.

Today, four years later, Kenny is back home in Oceanside and I'm still teaching aerobics. Everything else is different. Kenny made a remarkable recovery.

But he is not now, and never will be, the man he was before he shipped out for Iraq. He has retired from the Marines with 21 years of service—we waited to sign papers until he was eligible for a full pension—and is not working. He spends days cooking, cleaning and keeping an eye on the girls.

I'm still an advocate, speaking to church groups and Rotary clubs about the challenges of life after active duty. My message is simple. No matter when the Iraq war ends, the warriors who come home will need more than slogans, more than bumper stickers and ribbon magnets on cars.

They'll need resources to get the health care they need. Support for family members taking part in that care. A lot of prayer. And a nation committed to seeing them through.