

What can God do with a woman like me?

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Introduction

I never thought that I would be wandering around cities at 11 pm passing out angel pins. But there I was, meeting people: junkies, a mother of a young woman arrested for prostitution twice in one day, and a lady who had been hit 50 times in the head. Even a man saying “No one will get hurt, I need money for my baby.” That isn’t what I had in mind when I began my 7000-mile trek. I called my trip **THE ANGELS ALONG THE WAY GOODWILL TOUR** and had a sign company put those words and my web site address (www.teamofangels.com) on my van’s rear window.

Back in February, I decided to spend the summer traveling around the country. I hired a high school student to make a web site and then contacted military bases, the Katrina flood relief services and lots of newspapers. I believed in myself and what I wanted to do but obstacles kept popping up –mainly the financial side of it. How would I travel? Where would I stay? How would I pay for food? And also the people side of it: the dream busters who whispered that I was going through an identity crisis – “who does she think she is? The great white hope? She’s just a middle-aged mom who needs to get her head out of the clouds and get a job!”

I tried contacting car dealerships to ask if they would like to sponsor the tour by lending me a van for the summer and also spent hours trying to garner the support of hotel managers to offer a complimentary room; all was in vain. The more I talked to people, the crazier my dream seemed. I kept hearing this refrain in my mind: “Just travel and do good. Get up, get out, and get going.”

I finally bit the bullet, applied for a Discover credit card and rented a new gold van from Budget Rent-A-Car. I had magnetic signs made for the side panels and added 50 magnetic stars and angels. The signs on the side doors said ***NEED A TEAM OF ANGELS? OVERWHELMED? Ask us for a free angel pin and then kindly pass it along.*** A second sign read ***NEED HOPE?*** with the pass along message repeated.

Leaving from our Philadelphia suburb, I felt a great sense of anticipation and wondered what our immediate future held. My van was loaded with thousands of angel pins attached to a poem I had written. I wanted to reach out to others who were healing from hurts and disappointments and give them a little token of encouragement: my little gold team of angels pin. I had the pins packed in hundreds of plastic bags, each containing a dozen or more pins. I planned to leave them in churches, hospitals, drug rehab clinics and shelters. As I stopped at Holiday Inns, Pizza Huts and Cracker Barrel restaurants, I left a bag in the ladies restrooms. I hoped that traveling people would find them and be encouraged. The words of the poems were penned by me during a dark time in my life.... when I was placing all of my hope on the Good Shepherd. Before I placed a bag in a restroom, I prayed God, “please bless the person who finds this pin.”

It didn't take long until the black vehicle in front of me moved me to tears.

Chapter

1

Mom's Midlife Crisis

I sat alone in my living room in the middle of the night and thought, Maybe the kids are right – am I going through a mid-life crisis? Yes, the gnawing awareness that my life is more than half over haunted me, what did I have to show for it?

If I were a man, I would probably be signing on for hair replacements, buying a sexy cherry red corvette, dating a young “trophy” girlfriend. It could be worse, I said to my older children (ages 23, 22, 19 and 16). At least I'm not out barhopping and drinking, at age 54. Just think--you have a mom, driving nationwide in a van bedecked with angels and stars, passing out angel pins. Maybe it seems “a little puzzling” or a little nuts, as many have said.

“For God’s sake, why doesn’t Trisha get a real job?”

“Yeah, why doesn’t she just work like the rest of us?”

“Did you hear what she is trying to do now?!”

The worst pain was hearing “It’s another one of her feverish pursuits.” Lots of people had difficulty understanding it. I vowed not to tell anyone else what I was planning to do.

I tried to catch my breath, my face flushed with embarrassment. My stomach hurt, my head ached. I felt bad enough about my financial situation, fretting over money, but hearing people talking about me at my neighbor’s funeral cut to the core. But what about the part of trying to use any God-given talents, I said to myself. I guess nobody sees any such talent in me.

I had always worked part-time with a variety of home-based business ventures. I had an MBA in Finance. I was raising four children with busy schedules, swimming lessons, scouts, community work, and so on. I even wrote and published a few books. I was a guest on Oprah two times, make that three if you count the time one of the segments reran. I was also on lots of other shows like CNN, Sally Jessy Raphael, Maury Povich, and the 700 Club twice. To others, it seemed like I should just get my act together and start providing for my family.

What I wasn't counting on were the detours in my life--pulverizing and pummeling my life plan with pain and problems. I know I am no different than anyone else but when you are in the middle of the storm, you feel alone, and self-pity becomes God's teachable moment.

I began to doubt that life would be "normal" again. I was weighted with failures, mistakes, and fears. I struggled with lots of woulda's, coulda's and shoulda's. I recalled terrible disagreements, some difficult truths out in the open, depression, civil law suits, my daughter's car flipping on a lonely stretch of highway, an airlift by helicopter to a trauma center, illnesses, and regrets.

I had floundered for five years, exhausted, bewildered and overwhelmed. As one problem was resolved, three more appeared. Our family counselor panicked at the latest situation.

"I have never seen such a rash of pain in one family."

God, why is this happening? I'd cry out. It was a plea for guidance.

I cried, wailed and moaned, and prayed harder than ever. I was angry – raging at the people who had caused my problems; infuriated at the way my life was going.

In 1999, I started an angel pin project. It was my own tough times that inspired what I called THE SEND A TEAM OF ANGELS TO HELP movement.

I figured that when you are in despair, you need a whole team on your side. It provided an income for my family. I distributed 78,500 Team of Angels lapel pins and received 30,000 heartwarming letters and grim stories from people around the world – from Michael Ross, a prisoner on death row; a woman whose triplets were killed by a drunk driver; a child who had been abused; and, a young girl who credited the pin with helping her find a kidney donor. The common theme was that the little angel pin carried a message of hope, a little light at the end of a tunnel.

I discontinued my ministry of angels when a bad rainfall flooded the garage where I kept my pins, files, poems and supplies. I watched lounge chairs, boxes of my notes, all of my hard work, and computer parts float away. My eyes were bloodshot with tears for days and I felt weary from a week of cleaning up from a business now in ruins.

I moved in with my mother, the second time in five years. A marital separation had changed our lifestyle and “Mom-Mom” was always there to help.

The angel pins are gone. The project is over. I guess it is time for me to start something new, I wept. How am I going to begin again? I worried that bills would go unpaid and I would be mired in debt again.

God, where do you want us to live? Where is home for my family?

The following day I saw a beautiful stone home on the property of an old church. The sign read PARSONAGE FOR RENT. The touch of the sun and the gentle breeze quieted my anxiety. I love it, I said to myself. The tall trees, the wooden bench, the steeple pointing toward God, the gardens, the stained glass windows, the bell tower all seemed to say WELCOME - YOU ARE HOME. The bright glow of the sun reflected on the stained glass and seemed to pour much-needed healing toward the stone house.

I had a small amount of money in the bank to be used as a down payment for a house. I didn't have a job. I was separated from my husband of 25 years. By the grace of God, we settled in by that Sunday.

I love my home, so peaceful and special. I struggle with the Why's, though. God, why did you bring me here? Why can't I find a job? How do you want me to provide for my family?

My small savings was depleting rapidly - rent, utilities, car expenses, food for a hungry brood of teens, and college tuition for three daughters.

I began to have an image at night, which became almost an obsession. I'd lay there, staring at walls and ceiling, as the clock ticked relentlessly on, minutes, then hours as I lay in my bed, wide awake. I got up in the middle of the night, clicked on the light and reread some of the letters that had survived the flood.

On the mildewed and curled stationery, I re-read their words. My heart broke as I read the letter from a former Vietnam prisoner of war. He had read an article in the Stars and Stripes military newspaper that told of my donation of 5000 pins to our United States' troops. I pictured his battered face as he told me what my little pins must mean to servicemen and women fighting in Iraq. My fingers wrapped around the letter from a missionary who worked

in an AIDS home and the one from a teenager who clung to hope with her angel pin--her brother had been missing ten days from a mountain climbing trip.

The recurring dream, the one I could no longer dismiss, seemed to say, "Make 50,000 more TEAM OF ANGELS PINS and give them away. Reach out to others in need."

I was not in a position to take on such a venture. I lived across the street from the Golden Age Home for seniors. I wondered if some of those people had regrets about not following their hearts. An inner voice spoke to me "What if you never try it, Trisha. You will be ninety years old, sitting in a rocking chair wondering what would have happened if you had tried it."

I went to a park. I mused, as I looked upward. I was looking to the clouds for a sign - maybe I was expecting the swirling of angels. Preferably a trio of angels! I went to eight churches - asking the God of many faiths, Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, Unitarian, Jewish, Episcopal, Protestant, and Baptist, for help.

I thought of the people who had written to me over the years, depressed, lonely, discouraged, sick, and hopeless. I agonized for the city of New Orleans' victims, the coal miner's relatives, frail sick relatives, and those serving in Iraq. And what about 911 survivors, the people who lost someone, the people in ravaged war zones - couldn't they use a Team of Angels too?

I thought of how in my own life I had felt all of those desperate feelings. I asked God why He had put so many traumas and trials in my life. In the quiet recesses of my mind I heard a voice saying, "So you can truly relate to the pain of those who need your pins." God seemed to continue - "Trisha, if you step out in faith, I will provide."

I implored God, It seems foolhardy, and a waste of money I can't afford to waste. Please send me a sign. I said to myself I will know it is right if it is "seamless"- flowing effortlessly. I turned the computer on. The first word that popped on the screen was SEAMLESS. I received a card in the mail that said STEP OUT IN FAITH. I opened a book and saw the words "Increase our faith!"

I still could not bring myself to borrow the money to make this "thing" happen. What if it was just a crazy, hair brained, and silly notion? What if I really was going nuts?

I noticed the date February 2--my deceased brother Robbie's birthday. He was a go-getter. He seemed to tell me "JUST DO IT!" That night, I stepped out in faith and did it. I was officially into this, ready or not!

No more excuses, what better way to strengthen my faith than to give the little I had and ask God to do something with it? Do something with 50,000 angel pins and a little poem that accompanied it entitled A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR THE OVERWHELMED. This seemed like a tall request, in the conventional sense, but in the spiritual realm, it seemed possible. Only the thought of trying my best to trust Him moved me forward when logic said it was a dumb idea.

I ordered 50,000 gold Team of Angels lapel pins and 120,000 bookmarks. I asked my dad for help from heaven. The cemetery gates were open and I sat by his grave at midnight with a blank piece of paper and a flashlight in my hand. I looked up to the sky. I let my unconscious mind scribble the words that I heard, in my mind.

Trisha, we will send people to help you. You won't be alone. We will provide what you need to pass the message of the angels. You can do it. You will see lots of small acts of kindness. I am with you. Love, Dad.

Oh boy, I muttered to myself, I better not tell my kids about this - they'll say, "Now she is hearing voices!" I could just picture them rolling their eyes.

My heavenly Father, God, has created a patchwork quilt for my life. He took my pain and problems, forced me to pray, made a pin, and guided me on a new path. He wrapped the quilt around me like a warm Comforter.

Oh, now how in heaven's name will this all happen? I laughed to myself and listened to a whisper from God, "Remember, Trisha, how you love tea, hospitality and people. Why don't you visit lots of U.S. cities and ask anyone who believes in this to host a tea - in a church social hall, shelter, nursing home, hospital, sewing circle, recovery group or support group. You can share the story of the team of angels. Anyone who would like to share the "pass-it-along" angel pin can take the pins and begin passing them along." It sounded farfetched but intriguing.

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I told a friend in Maryland about the idea. He asked, "How are you going to do this?" I answered by Divine Providence. "I have a teacup overflowing with pennies here on my kitchen counter. I was wondering what I was going to do with them. I'll get them to you." I told a friend about that conversation and she said, "I have a cup of change. I'll get that to you." This morning I found a plastic bag with 70 pennies on my porch.

I went to an empty church with a notebook. To me the idea is to pass along a symbol of caring that is interfaith and inspirational. I sat and waited for the words to fall onto the paper. I wrote the following words as I daydreamed:

I wondered what would happen if I made 50,000 angel pins and passed them out to those who felt disconnected, overwhelmed, sad, tired, afraid, discouraged, angry, depressed, lonely, hurt or resentful. Please know that I am praying for you whenever you wear this pin. When you see someone who needs it more than you do, kindly pass it along. I hope that the three angels bring peace to your home, your heart and our world.



www.teamofangels.com

Chapter

2

Donna's Mom

I saw a black vehicle -- I think it was a jeep or SUV -- driving in front of me on Sunday, July 23. At a speed of 65 mph, it was impossible to connect and give the lady driving the car an angel pin but I felt she needed hope. The words on the back of her vehicle said

I MISS YOU. DONNA TRAVELEAR-WELLS 1978-2005.

I thought that the person named must be her daughter who was no longer here on earth -- her angel in heaven. I jotted down the name on a piece of paper because I wanted to do a computer search and know more about the daughter whom she never wanted the world to forget. I tried to catch up with her for miles and miles...hoping to see her at the Chesapeake House rest stop or one of the many toll booths along I-95. I pondered her loss and made a mental promise to call each of my three daughters to tell them *You are wonderful. I love you.* Her message to her deceased daughter expressed life's true fragility.

When I got to the Baltimore area toll booth, I prepared to pay my toll. I don't remember how much it was but I know it wasn't one of the little tolls like thirty-five cents or a dollar. I think it was about four or five dollars. As I extended my five-dollar bill to the toll-attendant, she said *NO TOLL DUE. THE LADY IN THE BLACK CAR IN FRONT OF YOU PAID FOR YOU.* I looked ahead -- it was the black jeep with the message to Donna. I started to cry and got goose bumps. Was it just a random act of kindness or was she connecting to me as we passed each other on the expressway? Did Donna's mother see the angels and stars on my gold van and the words **NEED HOPE? OVERWHELMED?** Did they make her think of her angel in heaven?

If you know her, please tell her I was trying to connect with her. I want to know more about her beautiful daughter. Was it a tragic accident that shattered this mom's life; was it a daughter clinging to life after a long illness that took her away too soon? I want her to be able to tell the world how sad it is that Donna is no longer here to shine her light. The message on

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the black jeep showed me the power of a mother's love. As the lump formed in my throat, I thought just like the words of my poems that were put in my mind to give away, Donna's mom's message of love for her daughter is meant to change lives, one speeding car at a time

Chapter

3

Mike and the Pink Petunias

“Hello, Mrs. Gallagher, my name is Mike and I received one of your Team of Angels pins when I came out of prison. I felt like it was a sign from my Higher Power. I am just calling to let you know what I did with the angel pin, because I know the message says to pass it along.”

Throughout life, he had been caught up in a lot of family problems and alcohol had been his means of coping. He had an impressive six years sober but the demands of taking care of a mother with dementia had drawn him back to his unhealthy old habits.

“After mom’s passing, I was devastated. I lost my sobriety and was arrested for a DUI. It wasn’t the first, I am ashamed to say, and my lawyer and family couldn’t cover for any more of my bad decisions. I had to go to jail.”

The message was on my answering machine. I wondered what the conversation would be about. Mike was in a Twelve Step recovery group and attended daily Alcoholic Anonymous meetings daily. He had seen a young woman, very distraught, walking to her car after the meeting. He went up to see if he could help. As she choked through her words, she explained she had terror-filled nights and painful bouts of depression, no medical insurance and couldn’t afford the right medicine – she had to depend on doctor’s samples, which were not dependable. As if that wasn’t bad enough, she couldn’t sleep because of her anxiety over the misery of a failed marriage. He gave her the Team of Angels pin for taking One Day at a Time. The following morning, she walked into the AA meeting room looking as proud as a peacock. She gave him a big smile and hug.

“Guess what, Joe”, she said happily, “I slept twelve hours last night after getting the pin.”

She was wearing the pin on a flamboyant green blouse with pink petunias.

“Joe, please don’t tell anyone but I am not going to pass this pin along...not until I am on the other side of this horrible disease.”

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“Don’t worry, “ Joe told her, “ with that team of angels, you are well on your way to recovery. They worked for me and I know they will work for you too.”

Tears came to my eyes. What a blessing this little pin was for a struggling young woman! Thank you, God for giving this young woman the gift of sleep, and for Mike passing along the Team of Angels!

Chapter

4

The ER

It was about 11 pm when the life-changing event occurred. It happened in a northeastern inner city, one that looked eerie and sinister. I saw a flickering light in the distance and drove to see if it was an ambulance. I went up to the EMT in the parking lot and asked if the building a few hundred yards away was a hospital ER.

“That is a shelter,” she replied.

I told my son Ryan and his friend Tyler to keep the car doors locked as I gathered my angel pins and stuffed them into a bag. I walked over to a young woman sitting outside on a gritty looking step. With my heart thumping loudly. I smiled and said, “Do you want an angel pin? Do you need hope?”

Her eyes opened wide.

She was so pretty, dark hair, fair skin, about twenty-four years old...her outer appearance was beautiful. What was she doing here? The shelter was a detox facility and she was there for heroin addiction, she told me. She started out doing “percs” and the addiction progressed. I looked into her eyes. She could have been one of my daughters, I thought; how did this girl end up here. I stared into her eyes and imagined her as a sixth grade child, wearing flashy sneakers with neon laces. I pictured a happy, loving, outgoing girl. That inner self seemed hidden behind anxiety and shame. Her parents had her “sectioned” a few times and she had been in counseling. They had tried to help her, free her.

Other patients gathered around, people from “the other side of the tracks,” those with many teeth missing, disheveled, a few looking wild and crazy from partying, and a lost-looking older lady grumbling. They were people no different than you and me – just weathering their problems alone and with the burden of addiction. They needed a miracle – could my small angel pin be a symbol of compassion and support?

I passed out one hundred pins and rosaries to folks with bandannas tied around their heads, body piercings and lots of tattoos. A staff member came over and sorted through my

plastic bags of pins. He said he would like to pass them to out-of-state relatives and patients at the support meetings, people desperately needing encouragement..

Back to the young girl - I told her I believed in her and that she was going to be okay.

“I’ll be praying for you, keep in touch, Sherri Anne,” I said. She stood up to walk away. She could have been a runway model.

“I will call you,” she promised.

I talked to her about my young adult children and how I worried about them, experimenting with things I, as a fifty-something mother, didn’t approve of. I told her of my tirades, how I took it personally when my kids put their lives in jeopardy. I shared the sadness I felt when I couldn’t bridge the emotional gap between us and communication was excruciatingly painful.

“I used to yell terrible things at my mom but I didn’t really mean them. I just felt so badly about myself,” she told me.

As she turned to walk toward the nurse, she said softly “Don’t give up on your kids.” She came back and hugged me. I hope the choices that took her down this traumatic road are behind her. It broke my heart and made me feel desperately sad.

She is worth saving, God. Please help her. In unlikely places, from a stranger, close to midnight in a sweltering city, I learned new insights about being a mother. I am not in control.

As Sherri Anne reminded me; Let go and Let God.

The gift wasn’t mine (the angel pin) to Sherri Anne, it was she to me.

Chapter

5

Jen's Miracle

The call began with a mother's soft voice, a bit hesitant about sharing the hurtful events in her life. Self-disclosure to a stranger takes a lot of courage. This mom had surrendered her burdens to God and said almost in a whisper, "We just take it one day at a time"

"I saw you on the news and wondered if you are still in the area passing out angel pins. I need a team of angels here in South Carolina."

She shared some of the hardships her family has experienced including the isolation, estrangement and alienation of a daughter, who, in the midst of a teenage rebellion, ran away.

The FBI had investigated her daughter's arrest for prostitution and drug dealing, her twenty-year old daughter was now serving prison time, her husband has panic attacks and her own bouts with anxiety have escalated. Add her child's bipolar disorder, her own mother battling the final stages of lung cancer, and an unplanned child to raise –it was almost unimaginable.

"I don't know what happened – we didn't raise her that way" - the shame of the less than perfect home-sweet-home for a Christian family. .

Alex and Ann are fifty-five year old parents who thought their childrearing days were over. Ann thought that her days of cleaning the house daily and running to the store for baby supplies were behind her. She thought she had moved on to the stage of moving a daughter into a college dorm. God had other plans.

They are now raising their daughter's baby, born right before her sentencing hearing for a serious crime. Jenny's term in federal prison is 45 years.

"Our daughter's two year old son is the light of our lives now but the sad part is that my daughter will never get to raise him. I take pictures every day and send them to her and I am keeping a scrapbook."

Once a week, Jen is allowed to make a collect call for three minutes. The first two minutes, the grandmother and her daughter talk and the last minute she puts the phone up to the baby's ear so he will know his mother's voice."

They began searching for help for Jen when she was eighteen; there was a lot of tension in the house when Jen decided that she didn't want to take her bipolar medication anymore. She began to hang out with a group of kids who were experimenting with drugs and alcohol. She ran off with them and although the parents did everything they could to catch up with her – because they loved her so much – she was always one step ahead of them. They even contacted Adult Protective Services because they had hit rock bottom with their fears for her safety while she was not on her medication.

"I felt like I was going to blow up and then melt down...and never be able to get up again," her mother recalled.

When Jen called after almost a year's absence, her mother hoped that her wayward daughter wanted to come home.

"Mom, I am about to have a baby and I am in prison. She asked her mother to come and get the baby...and raise it. Ann couldn't make such a decision without consulting her husband who was out of town on business.

His response "There is money in the bank from our income tax.... go make yourself a nursery."

"And how is your daughter now?" I asked.

"She has good days and bad days. Three days a week she has counseling to reduce stress and anxiety and attends an in-prison recovery group meeting. The other days, she is depressed. She says 'Mom, I dream every night that I am lost in a deep forest or that I fell into an empty swimming pool and I can't climb out. I keep slipping on wet leaves.' "

My heart ached. I could clearly feel the daughter's terror of being lost in the forest, no chance of seeing the light of the blue sky, no chance of raising her little boy in the light blue overalls. No chance of walking in the park and pointing out the sun to the little boy with the clear blue eyes.

I sent the mom a lot of angel pins. Since Jen is not allowed to have sharp objects like the lapel pins, I mailed lots of bookmarks with the poem:

A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR THE OVERWHELMED

I need a team of angels, Lord
I don't think one will do
Please send me all the help from high
For what I'm going through

Guardians to watch over me
And help my soul to cope
I'll do the best I can to pray
And cherish gifts of faith and hope

“And what has changed in your life now, Ann?”

“Everything,” she responded to my question. “We have had to embrace change, pray more, rely on God and we feel so much joy. Our little surprise grandson has made our family closer. I have so much compassion for my daughter who feels defeated and confused. My church friends and I pray constantly for God to be with her every second of the day. I am praying for a miracle.”

Let's all pray for Jen's miracle too.

Chapter

6

Polly Has a Pin

How do you get on the television news in Wheeling, West Virginia? For me, it was in a very unlikely way. Polly called in response to an article in her local newspaper. The headline caption read WOMAN TRAVELING WITH ‘A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR OTHERS.’

She asked how she could obtain some for the evangelism committee of her church. I suggested we meet at Perkins Restaurant. I didn’t know what she looked like so I asked each person entering “Are you Polly?” as they walked into the pancake house. With each “no” I explained what I was doing, passing out angel pins. They each shared a need with me.

“My sister-in-law just passed away. I just attended her funeral with my mother.”

“My husband drinks a lot and I can’t handle it.”

“This missing poster is the daughter of my friend.”

(Something inside of me ripped apart looking at the photo and description –terror shot through me.)

“My twelve-year-old grandson is in the middle of a sticky divorce and my daughter-in-law is trying to rake my son over the coals.”

A seventy-six-year-old lady was upset that her four adult children were not practicing the faith in which they were raised (and two of the marriages were on the rocks). “My husband and I have been married for 55 years, we go to church every day...what did we do wrong?”

“My nephew is about to go to Iraq.”

Then Polly came in. She had a loving smile and a tender way of talking. She had experienced a lot of detours and difficult intersections in her life but maintained her “kindness style.” In a brief conversation she showed me that she was the type of woman who prayed for answers.

We just clicked. I gave her 121 pins. As we left the restaurant, lo and behold, she treated us to lunch and paid the check!

“After I left you,” Polly told me later, “I was so excited. I had to swing by the television news station. I had no connection to the news anchor, Lee Anne Towne, but with so much bad stuff happening in the world, I thought this would be a great human interest story – how often do we have an angel lady in our town?”

About ten minutes later, the Channel 7 News invited me to come to the studio. They aired the interview on the both the late night evening and early morning news.

Polly called me last week. She shared how she was using the pins, which some call tiny treasures.

“I am still so excited about passing out the pins to people who are sad and blue. I am bubbling over. I am so glad the newspaper had the article. I just want you to know that I am not “wasting” them. Our church is trying to interest new members. We are using these in our welcome packets. Today, I went to visit an older lady and brought her cookies. I didn’t give her a pin. I have to really decide how to share these blessings. I didn’t think she was the type to appreciate it.”

I knew what she meant by that – my vision is to give my angel pins to people who are carrying heavy loads, crying troubled tears, and need the strength to just take that next step on the difficult path they must travel.

“I know you will find one hundred and twenty-one people traveling through stormy seas, detours and difficult life intersections. I know you will, with your warm loving heart and the tiny treasures. I have no doubt that Someone will guide you – you won’t ‘waste’ a single one,” I reassured Polly.

Okay, Polly, let’s do it!

Chapter

7

Pre-Appointed Pins

Some moms just go to work, get a paycheck, and live a 9 to 5 “normal” life ... and my kids were stuck with one who interpreted motherhood through a nomad’s lens, traveling from place to place, trying to connect to people with an angel pin ... that’s right three little angels holding hands, a simple gold lapel pin.. A mom handing out bags of angel pins up and down the East Coast of America. Now is that something you want to tell your friends about?

”No, my mom doesn’t work. She travels around and gives out angel pins.” I could just picture my older children trying to explain my concept of balancing work and motherhood. while at the same time desperately trying to get back on her feet financially.

That’s what I was thinking when I walked into the emergency room of a city hospital, late at night. My plan was to just hop out of my van, grab a bag of angel pins from the trunk, and give them to the triage nurse in charge.

With four kids of my own, I had been in plenty of ERs and I knew it was stress you could live without. I recalled the frantic prayers and bargains I often made with God, while racing to the hospital after a call from a policeman that my child was en route to the emergency room. I remember the fear while seated on the orange vinyl chairs.

I saw a Down’s syndrome little boy and then a lady holding her bandaged head, a mom and dad hugging, not in a romantic way, it was more like a “this is the end of our world hug.”

I remembered the anguish in my heart when my then 18-year-old daughter, Katelyn, was airlifted to a trauma center and another time when my husband was near death at another hospital. I paced outside the van, with my emergency flashers blinking, wondering if I should even go in.

It was close to midnight and the lobby of a hotel was really the place to be – not the lobby of an emergency room – especially if you didn’t even have a medical reason to be there.

I said a half-hearted prayer and asked God to bless what I was doing - because at this point I began to wonder if this was anybody's will but my own. What was preying on my mind was a comment that one of my children said to me at an angry moment, just a few hours earlier.

"Nobody supports you on this angel pin thing – not Dad, not Grandma, not anybody. Everybody is talking behind your back." I felt so bad that I almost made a tearful admission that maybe I am a nut ... and this was all a waste of time and money.

I put that thought behind me and hung on to my friend's parting words before I left for my trip. Frances had answered my query "What am I really going to do with all of these angel pins?" Who am I going to give them to?"

"They are preanointed. God will guide you. He knows where they are supposed to go. God gave you this gift, now go share it."

I explained to the security guard what I wanted to do, just pass out angel pins to the people in the waiting room. He looked at me like I was from another planet and continued doing his paperwork. Before boldly walking in to the waiting room, I showed my basket of pins to another guard.

"Can I just go in and give these pins to the people in the waiting room? I am from Philadelphia and I am traveling around the country trying to spread joy. There was an article about it in your local newspaper."

He looked at me like what I was saying was pretty-strange sounding but he sort of gave me the okay by turning his back away from me.

There were about thirty people seated around the room – all-silent, some transfixed watching the news, one guy mumbling, and a homeless-looking elderly lady sorting through a strongbox of important papers. Most of the people looked like they needed hope.

"Would you like an angel pin?" I said to the lady holding her head.

She reached into the basket and took the TEAM OF ANGELS FOR HOPE.

"Do you need hope?"

"Yeah, my daughter does 'cause she is trying to get her kids back.," she answered me.

"I just got beat in the head fifty times and the only thing I know to do is drink."

I turned to the next person. “Do you want an angel pin?”

She and the man seated next to her took a handful from the basket.

“Our daughter wants to have a baby and she can’t conceive. We need hope that she can adopt.”

“My aunt and uncle are sick. My uncle isn’t expected to make it.”

I went from person to person and the angel pins seemed to be contagious. People began passing them around and talking one to another. A black woman passed one to a Vietnamese man and the smile between them said more than if they had been able to communicate. She prayed over me and asked for God’s blessing and traveling mercies for my journey.

“Are you in AA?” a young woman asked, “Because you gave me A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR ONE DAY AT A TIME. Can I have more for some of my friends at the meeting? My son, Ryan, went out to the car to bring in another basket.

I felt a tap on my shoulder.

“Can you give one to my mother in the wheelchair over there?”

The pins weren’t really that much – it was the message behind it - that made me feel happy. I watched the people share kindness, a little token of forget-me-nots. Yes, forget-me-nots, that’s what one lady called the pin. When you pass it along, it is a reminder that someone cares and that God forgets-me-not. I liked that thought.

Then there was the African-American woman whose folded arms screamed a message of “stay away from me.” She looked like she was about to make a snippy comment as I leaned forward and told her that I was not trying to sell her anything. She looked suspicious, no money? I held the angel pin toward her.

“This is for you,” I said. I gave her the pin: A TEAM OF ANGELS TO PROTECT MY LOVED ONES. She opened her heart and her crossed arms and thanked me, her suspicion melting.

“Are you sure you’re not soliciting for these?”

“No, maybe someday you can pass the pin along to someone else who needs it.”

It felt so good to touch strangers and clasp a few hands.

I watched a young man offer a chair to an older man. It couldn't have been more than fifteen minutes that I stayed in that room – but I witnessed goodness and kindness in a room filled with different cultures and races, a mix which in the outside world, can cause bitterness and war.

The message, *We are all the same in God's eyes*, seemed to resonate in this room.

I was bewildered by what had just happened. I saw respect and caring for one another where moments before no one had been talking.

The tension in the room seemed to lessen.

“Okay,” I said to myself, “my half-hearted silent prayer worked . I felt like I was finding the takers of the pre-anointed pins.”

I never saw a nurse or the security guards again but I saw a group of nameless people, some with faces as wrinkled as raisins, with home lives probably as frantic as a cat and mouse game, helping one another get through a tough time.

Thank you, God and Frances for the special people in this room who were pre-anointed.

Now, I can face my kids ... the wandering mom has 1500 more miles to go, a little bit of money, and a lot of enthusiasm. “

C'mon, Ryan. It's time to hit the road! It's been a delightful day.”

Chapter

8

Erma's Words of Wisdom

My dream to travel for the summer to pass out angel pins was on the verge of happening. This was not all-expenses paid trip – this was being funded by the sale of my house and the bounty of a Discover credit card.

I had thought about pitching a tent and camping so that Ryan and I could do the 7000-mile trip on a budget. With the high cost of gas, creeping up to \$3.50 a gallon, tolls and other travel expenses, I was more than a little apprehensive.

So were most of the people who knew me, especially since we had never camped before and I didn't have a job. E-mails and phone calls from well-meaning friends could not dissuade me but they did cause me to clasp my hands, clench my teeth and pray like crazy for guidance.

Inside I fumed because very few people in my life believed in me. What did people expect me to do – after five months of planning, twiddle my thumbs and say, “Well I guess y'all are right” and cancel my plans!

Trisha, I don't think you should do this. Why don't you just stay put this summer? I think you are being unrealistic.

Make no mistake, it's not that I think you don't want to help others but why not here in your own backyard? You could do volunteer work locally. You can't afford to do this.

I know that you like adventure, perhaps this is a mid-life crisis and you can work through it at home this summer.

I tried to seek support from hotels for a complimentary overnight room, auto dealers for a free summer van rental, and food chains for a few meals but there were only a few managers who wanted to support an unknown mom and her son driving around the small towns of Middle America following some idealistic dream of bringing help to hurting others. I

liked to think that I was creative and imaginative but my cheeks burn as I remember what some relatives thought of my idea.

But I knew THE ANGELS ALONG THE WAY GOODWILL TOUR was off to good start when Erma called. She was the first lady to respond to an article in a Florida newspaper announcing that we were going to visit Orlando. I felt love and warmth over the telephone line – even before meeting her.

A hairdresser for the Disney characters at the Epcot theme park, Erma read about our campaign to spread hope.

She said, “I would like you and Ryan to be my guests.”

As a Disney employee she had complimentary passes. I had to tell her that although the newspaper said Ryan and I would be traveling south, we had added two more to our traveling clan in the van. My husband, John, and Ryan’s friend Dale were packed and ready to go. She checked with her co-worker, Gerri Linda, and between the two of them, they offered admission passes to all Disney properties for all four of us, for two days.

They met us at the park entrance and flashed bright smiles as well as the tickets.

Later in the day, just sitting and being with each other outside a Holiday Inn, I knew I had met somebody very special. We talked about daily struggles, laughed about how we both handled the hassles in our life, and I mentioned a troublesome note that I had recently found related to a family member – you know the type that puts a mother on high alert.

She didn’t know it but just a half hour before, I was outside the hotel, letting myself have a good cry. My body was shaking and I felt weak and looked pale. I had worked my emotions into a tizzy, fretting about other people in my family. (Thank goodness I had the good sense to move away from my own van, decorated with angels and stars, while sobbing!)

I thought about postponing our “meeting” until I could at least put makeup over the blotches on my face and dark circles under my eyes. How could the “angel pin lady” who was on the road to help others be caving in?

It wasn’t the kind of topic that I would have shared with friends back home. Oh, how God works mysteriously and magically when grim topics (like the note) play in a mom’s mind. Erma had a very similar issue with a family member and what a great solution she

offered. *You don't need to do anything about the note. All kids feel that way at one time or another.*

She passed along a “truth” that only moms and wives who have been on that route before could offer. I desperately needed to know her message “that everything is going to be okay” and relief surged through my body.

I gave her lots of angel pins and she gave me a beautiful wind chime and an angel that she crafted herself. But, oh she gave me so much more.

What she didn't know was that this trip to Florida was part of marriage reconciliation, the first time my husband and I had traveled together in seven years. There I was, a middle-aged woman with a spreading waistline, trying to re-create what we had before we separated - I was scared, really scared. I was afraid to let my guard down – we had gone to a marriage repair weekend and unfortunately, after talking in depth, we had not forgiven each other for the hurts and were unable to give each other unconditional love. We still wanted the other one to change.

We had lived apart for five years – after being married for twenty-five years. I was confused about some things and anxious about two lives that had been out of touch for so long. In many ways, we were disconnected. And yet both of us wanted to be rekindled.

She was compassionate, good humored and seem to know about tools for healing. I don't know why but I found myself sharing painfully honest feelings about my relationship with my husband. We had each been on our own for five years, self-centered, preoccupied selves, how could we become as one again? We both wanted to have an authentic relationship but there was a lot of sadness and hurt that had sucked the energy out of our relationship. We had come back together for a crisis related to one of our children, not because of a deep yearning for romance.

And then I met Erma, a stranger with a long-lasting marriage, with pearls of wisdom to share. She seemed to have kept her eyes on the prize even when problems cropped up.

At first, it seemed impossible to pull all of the details of the trip together, but faithful angel friends, like Erma, helped every step of the way.

I pulled out my dog-eared notebook, bulging with scribbled words of encouragement, strength and fortitude that I collected while separated, wise words of wisdom, and I penned Erma's words of advice. *God has brought your husband back for comfort and support. It has been a gift from God. "God Change" happens slowly, but it will last.*

Comfort and support, the two things that I needed when I asked him to come home. I was feeling weak, overwhelmed and alone. I needed him. He needed me. We all needed each other, for comfort and support. The other things, the romance, managing money together, spirituality, mutual friends, the things that were still a little fuzzy, they could wait. I now had profound comfort and support, and that is what I need the most.

The "Disney Lady" probably wouldn't even remember what she said that night, but they were words I will never forget.

Maybe it is a mid-life crisis, and I thank Erma for helping me through it.

Chapter

9

Mom on the Road

These are some of the headlines that newspapers used to tell readers about a 55-year-old mom who was trying to follow her heart - that woman is me! A mom who while having a late night cup of tea and a sweet roll in February came up with a preposterous idea! I sat on my living room couch and thumbed through old inspirational issues of *Guideposts* and *Angels on Earth* magazines, trying to slow my racing thoughts down..

I wondered what would happen if I went on a road trip, in a rented gold van from Budget, emblazoned with angels, stars and magnetic signs. The message on the side doors of the van said

ARE YOU OVERWHELMED? ASK US FOR A FREE ANGEL PIN AND THEN
KINDLY PASS IT ALONG.

What was my reason for traipsing around the USA passing out 50,000 Angel pins... one person, one pin, and one sad or inspirational story at a time? What would make a middle-aged mom, with only one teen still at home, decide to pursue such a venture, loading a van with boxes of Angel pins attached to a poem that I had written, and cereal boxes, backpacks, and maps with lots of X's marked YOU ARE HERE.

If I really thought too much about it, it would feel embarrassing – what if the whole thing was a flop? How would I even begin to do the *jillion* things required to make this trip happen?

I wasn't really a wild and crazy lady, but I did feel that something wonderful was going to happen. I reveled in the excitement, much like the time when I was 18 years old and bicycled around Europe. And, again when I was 21 when I lived in Mexico for six months. Maybe this grown up mom just wanted a free spirit midlife adventure. Would everyone think I had gone bonkers?

With so much sadness on the news, thousands of soldiers far from home in Iraq, leaving family behind to defend their country, refugees fleeing war-torn countries, American citizens

on high alert keeping a watchful eye on other world trouble spots, it is no wonder people are feeling anxious, I thought. What if I just gave away 50,000 pins and asked those 50,000 people to pass it along to someone else in need? What would change in the world if people were kind...and what would change in me if I did it? I did this trip. I really did it during the summer of 2006. It made sense to me.

But's that's the problem. I actually believed that I was following an answer to a question that I had asked God. *How can I use the gifts you have given me?*

Well, for Pete's sake, isn't raising your children enough for you (or trying to run their lives and control them?) well-meaning friends implied when I told them my plan.

My three older daughters (ages 23, 22 and 19) were independent and living away from the proverbial nest. I, the mother bird, was having trouble cutting the apron strings. I knew it was time to give my family a break, and stop trying to fix problems.

Raising teenagers and young adults has had its challenges – turning away boys who came to pick up my daughters with beer on their breath, and keeping an eye out for unhealthy relationships, was rattling my nerves and producing panic with my emotions. The crazy-making *what-ifs* troubled me. There were many nights that I slept clutching my Team of Angel pins to keep away the fears.

I thought I was being helpful (the all-wise mother) but sometimes helping too much hurts. I was the original Ms. Fix-it and people didn't want my fixin'. It was time to get a life!

I was feeling a little blue after returning home from my 7000 mile trek. Did the trip make a difference? Did anybody really care about the pins? Have they been relegated to lying in somebody's sock drawer – just another little thing collecting dust?

I picked up the package of letters wrapped in a jumbo rubber band lying on the kitchen counter. The mail had arrived while I was on the road, waiting unopened until the wanderer returned home.

I would like to have one for my wife. She has great faith in angels. It would be nice if I could have one of your angels, but if not I would understand.

Patricia, do you have something appropriate for a friend who lost a son to suicide a year ago –and is still devastated? He was such a happy-go-lucky kind of person or so we thought.

I have been ill and overwhelmed recently. I am also a caregiver to my elderly dad. I sure need a Team of Angels now – more than ever.

I received a Team of Angels pin several years ago. I wear it every day.

This is quite a ministry you have taken on. So much negativity in our world today. Nice to hear positive things. God bless.

I am writing because at 78 years of age I am surrounded by nothing but problems. I need miracles and angels in my life. Please help me to understand how I can change my situation.

Please keep me in your prayers. I am looking for a new job and a place to live. The friend that I am living with now is going to an assisted living facility.

The first news article was in *The Boston Herald* on July 4, 2006. The reporter forwarded this e-mail to me: *Patricia, A man needs two free Angel pins, one for his chronically ill wife and one for him. Can you mail it to his home address in Boston?*

My wife and I received our team of angels today. You don't have to call me because I don't want you to have to spend money on a long distance call. I just wanted to tell you that I got the chills when I read your poem. They will be passed on. I liked the poem on the bookmark that said:

A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR GETTING WELL

They are angels of kindness

They trod softly at night –

You'll feel God's healing

And the warmth of their light.

They believe in your goodness

You have a place in their heart

This team of angels

Will never depart.

A few days later, I received a call from Barry. *I really love the pin and I know you want me to pass it along. I am calling to ask your permission not to – you see I want to wear it. Forever.*

Our story was covered in ten newspapers, two radio interviews, two nightly newscasts, and one morning news broadcast. From Florida to Massachusetts, through the heart of Appalachia into West Virginia and Ohio, people were told to look out for the lady in the gold van and request a free pin. As the article appeared in each local town, folks called my cell phone saying they needed a Team of Angels to help.

House calls? Not to worry, yes, we deliver. Our van was filled with Angel pins attached to the each of the thirteen poems I had written. My son, Ryan, was reading me directions as I was driving the ANGELS ALONG THE WAY GOODWILL TOUR VAN (a fancy name for Ryan and I on the road looking to pass out Angel pins!). *Stay in the right lane. Go through a short tunnel and go over a bridge and you will cross the Ohio River.*

We were on our way to another “house call” delivering Angel pins to Mary. Mary and I relaxed on her back patio while Ryan swam in her pool. I sipped lemonade from a delicate porcelain glass, under a leafy tree, on the crest of a hill, while she told me what she was going to do with her six dozen pins. I hoped that the joyous glimmer in her eyes had something to do with the Angel pins.

I gave an Angel pin to someone on the side of the road having car trouble, one to a policeman, and one to a family on the beach in Connecticut. We raced from town to town passing out Angel pins to stranded people, busy waitresses and elderly frail women in nursing homes. My cell phone rang many times.

Hi, my name is Carla. I am so depressed. I heard about your Angel pin. I was married to an abusive man for thirty years. I still hear those ugly words and the sounds of violence in my mind. How can I get an Angel pin to help?

Where do you live? What town? I asked.

Upon hearing her response, I said:

I am very close to that area. I am near the church. Maybe I am being too forward, but would you like me to stop by and bring a pin?

That would be great but I am still in my pajamas, she said.

How about if I come in fifteen minutes?

I went and knelt in the church so Carla could have fifteen minutes to get dressed. There was a funeral mass going on at the church. I sat for a few minutes as the priest and friends described Michelle as an angel, a young nurse in her twenties. I gave some pins to the funeral director for the family and left a bag in the back of the church.

When I arrived at Carla's house for this spur-of-the-moment visit, I noted her kind little smile and tender caring eyes. She proudly showed me beautiful religious pictures that adorned her walls, framed embroidered scripture verses and furniture pieces she was very proud of. I dropped by to give her twelve Angel pins for her grown up children with very grown up problems. I learned all about the women who believed in love and fidelity but who married *street angels* – *house devils*. The ladies who are tormented, blamed and injured...the countless suffering women, who spend thirty years praying on their knees for a miracle.

I heard about the family of a young girl who had committed suicide; she lived just a few minutes away. I left some pins on a bench outside her family's house. As unbelievable as this sounds, someone told me of another family three blocks away with the same tragedy and I put pins in their mailbox.

Why am I doing this? God, am I on the right track? I constantly queried my higher power as Ryan and I trekked across the country. Nevertheless, my cell phone rang again and again and again... a pin was needed for lady who works for children mistreated, "pray for my son Joe and wife Maura – whose marriage is falling apart," a VA soldier battling alcoholism, someone suffering with a migraine, a two year old with a stomach tumor, someone stuck in a lousy job, and loads of people who were lonely and discouraged. The voices on the phone still echo within me. I then heard a low voice within my heart – the words of Psalm 46:10 *Be still and know that I am God.*

Okay God, I will listen to your call and the calls that come to me via my cell phone.
The phone rang again.

I live alone. I am a widow. I don't have anybody. I can't get out of my bed. My nurse is so mean. I can't get another health aide. My wheelchair is too wide for these hallways. I need a round about wheelchair. I was going to commit suicide. Nobody wants to hang out with a sick old lady like me. Then I read your poem in today's paper. The one that says A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR TAKING ONE DAY AT A TIME. It gave me hope. How can I get one of those pins?

The verse read:

At times I need to stop and pray
When I'm confused about my day
Should I do it later? Or do it now?
I'm not even sure if I know how.

When I'm upset and don't know why
I pray the Lord will get me by
And send a team of angels near
To help me see my problem clear.

Hang in. Don't hang up. Don't worry, Martha. The pins are on their way!

Chapter
10

We Were On Our Way to West Virginia

We were on our way to “West Virginy,” looking for people who needed a *Team of Angels*, just Ryan and me in a shiny gold van. The trunk was loaded with 50,000 gold angels – their wings offering a little celestial sign of support. My idea to pass out pins was finally being carried out - on the wings of my imagination.

We hung sparkling angels and dangled gold stars on kinked wire and magnets to decorate our van. We were going on a road trip nationwide – (a drab summer was not in my plans) just looking to give them to people who had experienced bad breaks, major surgery, the woe of moving into a nursing home, young couples suffering through a divorce and people just trying to be brave. We were set to listen to stories that touched our hearts. Interesting people with lots of bags of misery in their lives, I figured, needed a Team of Angels to help.

My teen-age son Ryan had a lot of spunk and energy and I had a dream and guts – a good combination for a mid-summer vacation.

We read about the coal miners who had been trapped with only one surviving the mining disaster. We figured in Appalachia the folks could use a little spiritual token and a symbol that Americans haven’t forgotten their tragedy. So armed with the special lapel pin I created and the poem that I wrote, we took off for a five-week jaunt.

Some folks thought the idea of me traveling with Ryan passing out my Angel Pins was downright silly but in fact I was excited about listening to my favorite CDs and bonding with my 16-year-old son. It would also be a time that he would be forced to do the summer reading he had been putting off. It had been a stressful year for our family and I thought this trip would do us both a world of good.

I knew that we were not going to be able to leap over tall buildings and save the world but perhaps, somewhere, somehow, our little flock of Angel Pins could make a difference. I

was just steppin' out in faith on my mid-life adventure, hoping to give the pins to ladies with cancerous tumors, men with infected kidneys and others with lots of troubles on their minds.

As I planned my route earlier this summer, I sat on a rocking chair on my porch, wondering if I could really make this happen. I thought of the words on a poster I once saw on my fifth grade bulletin board. The words stayed with me NO ACT OF KINDNESS, NO MATTER HOW SMALL. IS EVER FORGOTTEN. So we loaded the van with a couple of Sunday-go-to-meeting outfits, our favorite quilts with green and white squares, Angel Pins, and paper and pens to jot down the stories of the people we met along the way. My phone rang a lot more than most, as I contacted women's' clubs, military wives, and church groups to see if they wanted a speaker.

How in the world is she going to do this 7000-mile road trip? What is she thinking?

I think she should worry more about finding a real job so she will get Social Security. You know, she is struggling to make ends meet.

Surely, she's not considering doing all of that driving alone –it's just ain't safe for her and Ryan.

I even heard a few comments that are best not repeated. People droned on about why I shouldn't go. I gritted my teeth and tried to ignore the meddlers who filled me with resentment.

I hung on to the words of Mary whom I had met at a church where I had written my 13 poems. She handed me a framed picture of the Good Shepherd along with the 23rd Psalm. *God has something mighty planned for you.* I remembered her words when naysayers reminded me that I didn't have the means to pursue this venture. I yearned for some visible sign of support and validation for what I was doing.

I had had my share of problems in recent years and I could sense pain in a mother's eyes pretty quickly. That's what I thought when I saw a tired homely looking mother standing on a corner with a small child. She looked troubled. I pulled up to the stoplight and motioned to the lady *Would you like an angel pin?* She walked to my car window and gave me an appreciative look, and said *Thank you, saved by the grace of God.*

It is a pass it along pin. Just keep it until you see someone else who needs it and then pass it along. Our eyes met, she now looked like a happy and cheerful mom, a half-smile on her face.

~

Hey mom, wait a second. I think I see a Pizza Hut. We have to go there to eat.

My sixteen-year-old son's eyes lit up with excitement. When my four kids were young, we went there on special occasions - they no longer existed in our area.

I am willing to wager that Ryan and I attached 1,000 Angel Pins to my inspirational bookmarks while seated at Pizza Hut in western Pennsylvania. We knew that people with chronic illnesses and any sort of handicap always appreciated an encouraging word. We were always on the lookout for someone who wasn't feeling well in restaurants and parking lots.

Two ladies peered at us from a nearby table. We still had 45,000 more pins to attach.
Mom, look over there. Those ladies are looking at us. I bet they are wondering what we are doing.

Go give them some, Ryan, I said. That seemed to be my usual request to him whenever I saw someone in a wheelchair, an elderly person or just someone having trouble walking.

No, let's just wait until they go by our table.

As they passed, Ryan's face was radiant as he offered them pins. We had 13 different poems to choose from. They looked at the verse on the yellow bookmark, and nodded in agreement. *We know a group that could really use these.*

~

A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR TAKING ONE DAY AT A TIME

At times I need to stop and pray

When I'm confused about my day.
Should I do it later? Or do it now?
I'm not even sure if I know how.

When I'm upset and don't know why
I pray the Lord will get me by

And send a Team of Angels near

To help me see my problem clear.

~

I work in a crisis pregnancy center. These will be great for the young women. We face the challenge of bringing them help and hope.

As we walked in the parking lot, we saw a car with a United States Air Force decal on the rear window. I gave him the all-clear signal as if to say **THAT FAMILY PROBABLY NEEDS A TEAM OF ANGELS**. I often placed my angels on windshields of strangers' cars hoping that it might brighten someone's day or help in some way to rebuild a crushed dream. Laughing, Ryan said to me - *I know, Mom, you are going to tell me to go put a pin and bookmark on their front window.*

I rustled through my bag, dug down to the bottom and fished out the perfect verse and handed it to Ryan. He put it under the windshield wipers.

~

A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR ALL MILITARY FAMILIES

Please send a Team of Angels, Lord

To watch my loved ones dear.

To guard them and protect them

When they are far or near.

I worry about the world, Dear Lord

In which we all now live.

A blessed Team of Angels

Is the best gift I can give.

~

A lady who looked like she was stretched to a snapping point looked at me warily as I put pins on car windshields. I had seen her in the restaurant, wringing her hands and talking with an anguished look She looked like the type of woman my grandfather would have said,

She's a real doozy. I overheard her conversation. I just don't want to wake up any more. I can't really handle all of this. I just want it the way it was before.

I asked, "Can you use a Team of Angels?" She looked puzzled, "A Team of Angels?" The peculiar looking lady gripped the pin tightly and looked at me with gratitude. "What great timing," she said, and gave me a hug. Her looked seemed to say -

Why are you doing this? Do you want anything from me? Can I trust this simple act of kindness? Is this an outreach, a vision, a partnership, a ministry, a fund, a solicitation?

No, I think it is simply a link, a helping hand in the form of angels, and a twosome, a son and his mom saying YES to her dream! I enjoyed looking into strangers' eyes, hoping that by scattering the pins, it will convey *it will be all right*, a symbol of hope, to people immersed in a stream of rocky rapids.

My son and his wife were married 34 years and then separated. They have grown children. They both want to work it out but can't seem to do so. Maybe this will help. May I ask for the favor of one more for a friend who is overwhelmed? Her daughter's boyfriend pulled a gun on her, now he is in jail for drugs, and she is a nervous wreck. The daughter and the guy in jail have a four-month-old baby.

~

Why God, why did you bring us to that Pizza Hut? I got an odd feeling, a twinge of uneasiness, was it for the pregnant young moms, the serviceman's family, or the worried mother who had weathered many of life's summers and winters? Who are these pins for?

I thought of the beautiful young girl, Sammi, who became addicted to heroin. She passed along her Team of Angels to Russ, old and white-haired, a disheveled homeless crack addict. He probably slept among a heap of plastic trash bags and shopping carts filled with junk in Philadelphia. He looked like his family had said *good riddance* to him a decade ago. It is strange for me to see someone like that wearing my pin and I am always curious about how they got it.

I felt sorry for the guy and often stopped by to give him money or a six-pack. I knew what he would do with it but I know what it is like to be addicted. There was a box for newspapers that stood unused near his corner stoop. I often dropped goodies in the box, sort

of like a care package, as I passed. He seems poor and needy. He's so happy to retrieve my treats in the morning. One day, I gave him the angel pin. He was the first person I told about my addiction. He pinned it on his shirt.

She said, "I am just like you. We share the same struggle" although she looked like a beautiful girl from the suburbs. She told him of her anguished attempts to overcome her addiction. His look seemed to say *don't waste your life.*

Ma'am, can you say a prayer for my brother. His name is Eddie (or did he say his name was Eddie?) He's been missing for five years. Did he still have hope that he would be found?

I imagined the absolutely heartbroken parents, a mother who had once rocked this boy, a brag book filled with pictures, a father snuggling with his son under a quilt watching Superman – what do you do with all of the reminders of a parent's love? I felt heartbroken at the thought. of the family's impossible journey. I asked the young man *what about your mother and father?*

We didn't have much of a family life. My family is my girlfriend's family. I always longed for a place where I could feel safe. So did my brother.

I said a prayer, *Heavenly Father, please bring protection and care for Eddie and Tommy – and all of the children whom long for a caring father and mother, a kitchen table with fresh blueberry pancakes, a batch of cinnamon rolls in the oven and a quilt to snuggle under. For all of the kids who don't have much of a family life, kids living under bridges and eating out of trashcans, those in need of a big bear hug and an arm around the shoulder, please let us find them to tell them "you're not alone."*

Why were we on the road leading to West Virginia? Maybe the whole trip was just a corny idea. I don't know. I was higher than an angel strumming a harp in heaven when we returned home. I thought of the old lady with the large hearing aids in her ears who smiled from her car window and said *good health and good luck*, and the girl who had been bullied, with scars etched on the inside. *I often feel left out and hurt. My favorite poem is the one you wrote FOR TAKING ONE DAY AT A TIME.*

I smiled as I drove away from the senior center at the memory of the lady who said *Darlin', I will never forget you for giving me this gift.*

Was this grassroots trip an occasion for A TEAM OF ANGELS TO COME TO THE RESCUE? Just a little flotation device, for those caught in the current of a rocky rapid and weathering tough life conditions. Maybe it is true *Trisha has always had crazy ideas.* I don't clench my teeth when I hear things like that anymore, because it is absolutely true.

Ryan and I met lots of caring souls with my crazy idea, and it felt good to be needed, but when he got homesick for his dad and his girlfriend, it was time to return home. It was the best summer of my life – a mom, heavily laden with Angel Pins traveling with her 16-year-old son, always on the lookout for someone sad or disappointed. Ryan, tall and handsome, carrying a fistful of pins, was a beautiful sight. Just in case he met someone with an ulcer or migraine, he was prepared with a smile and a pin. I guess I was just meant to be the ANGEL PIN LADY, going on a weird and wonderful summer vacation!

Chapter

11

Larry, Norman and Harriet: My Personal Team of Angels

I looked down at the lime green pants suit I was wearing with the matching shoes. I bought last year for \$9.99 at Ross. I was on my way to speak to a group of college students. I doubted that the outfit was presentable.

My attention was drawn outward as somebody was telling me I had a nearly flat tire. *Great, more money!* I thought.

I was so broke I was now relying on credit cards. It really seemed like a lot of the situations were beyond my control, such as medical expenses not covered, but this one was my fault. I decided to follow a dream – not impulsively but after a lot of praying for wisdom. Last year, I took the \$30,000 in proceeds from the sale of my house, sold my van, and moved into a rental property so I could use the money to make 50,000 Angel Pins to give away.

I have heard family members say “How is she ever going to get rid of them?” The undercurrent was that I had wasted the family funds with my Angel Pin project. But to me they are a meaningful token of support. I ask people to pass the pin and poem along when they find someone who needs it more than they do. I have thousands of pins, boxes of letters from grateful recipients and lots of promises of prayers from strangers worldwide.

I began writing poems as a release and put them on pins featuring three gold colored Angels. I soon came to believe that there were many people with problems who could perhaps find my pins inspirational. The poem “For the Overwhelmed” began:

A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR THE OVERWHELMED

I need a Team of Angels, Lord

I don't think one will do

Please send me all the help from high

For what I'm going through

Because I was following my heart, not my pocketbook, I took to the road this summer, my rented van cluttered with the new batch of 50,000 pins for hurricane and coal mine victims and others in hospitals, addiction centers, chapels and military installations as I drove up and down the East Coast and out to Ohio.

After my talk that afternoon, I went in to a coffee shop in Haverford. I sat on a comfortable chair and closed my eyes. It overlooked a parking lot filled with expensive cars, beautiful women in expensive outfits, women with artfully applied makeup, designer sunglasses, professionally coiffed and looking so financially secure. They would never shop at Ross and certainly never be out of season with a lime green suit with a wrinkled satin bow. They probably didn't have a care in the world.

A man came over and sat across from me, in a large orange chair. He had a gaily-colored cane, with a pattern like a rattlesnake, leaning against his leg. He had red clogs on his feet, a fishing hat, sunglasses, and a nice smile. He said, "*I don't want to interrupt your thoughts.*"

And so I ignored him, closed my eyes again, clutched my hands together, listened to the music, and lost myself in self-pity.

I was conscious of my rudeness. It seemed like a long time when I finally asked *What gets you through tough times?* Not exactly a surface conversation starter with a stranger.

Friends, family, loved ones. When you are going through something, you need people to stay with you and offer encouragement. Some people think it is the big things that matter, but it is really the little things that mean the most. Like in this expensive zip code area especially, many people think it is the cars, fancy houses, prestige, jobs, saving accounts, investments... but material things don't matter when you have a medical problem with your brain. I wear the sunglasses because the glare of the sun hurts my eyes, and the walking stick is for balance. I came over to you because that green suit fits with that chair so nicely and you radiate something.

I can't believe what you are saying because I am sitting here thinking about a project that I am doing. In a minute, I gave him the short version of my current life.

He smiled. You are doing good for humanity. You are helping others. It doesn't have to make sense when you follow your heart People around here have the same problems as everybody else – heavy with cares, illness, bills, life problems. Don't give up on this. Your pins are renewing people who feel defeated.

His friend Norman joined us; then his mother, Harriet. She said, “Your green suit is lovely.”

Harriet, Norman and Larry were the Team of Angels I needed to meet yesterday.

Chapter

12 Stop the World, I Want to Get Off

When a feature writer wrote a story for a newspaper wire service, lots of people contacted us and asked for my Team of Angel Pin. I didn't know that my heart would be ripped open, time and time again, as my son and I traveled along the east coast. My little two-year-old boy was taken from me when I had to go into a psychiatric hospital. He was placed in a foster home. For two years I have been trying to get my life together, medicine, therapy, working with caseworkers. The worst part was that I physically ached for him, I yearned for him. I only had an hour a week visitation and an attendant from the county welfare office supervised it. In September I lost him. He was put up for adoption. Today I saw an ad for Toys R Us in the Sunday paper. I saw so many toys he would have liked. He loved Thomas the Steam Engine. I went into Steele's Department Store. I get so sad seeing the toys and the little boy clothes. And when I see little kids that come up to me, it is just too much for me to bear. I hope he finds me and comes back to me when he is older. The last pictures I had of him were on my cell phone and then my phone was stolen. Thank you for giving me a Team of Angels pin last summer on the day I was going to court.

Why in the world would a lanky son, age 16 and a middle-aged mom travel around the USA with a message to hang on to hope? And the sixteen-year-old son wasn't even grumbling about it!

With just a feather comforter, a backpack and his favorite CDs packed in a rental van, he was excited about going with his mom. I knew that this would probably be the last year he would want to go with me, what with his girlfriend, a summer job at Wendy's, and sports camps. I knew a summer vacation together was something to be cherished.

A lot of American families seemed to be at the end of their rope. A young man killed in an accident, a lady with deep depression, three sick lonely widows in Philadelphia, a lady bedridden in need of a wheelchair (cared for by a very mean nurse), a nephew leaving for Iraq,

untended quarrels from long ago, a two year old in a children's hospital and a lady that had just been given the message "I am sorry there is nothing more we can do for you."

I thought I knew what it felt like to feel alone and scared. My feelings were nothing compared to those of the Vietnam War veteran I met at a VA hospital. He talked of his nightmares. Thirty-three years after leaving Viet Nam, the fears, tears and nightly sweating still rip his insides apart.

Some nights I still see the faces of my buddies, their body parts exploded all over. Even now I can't handle the sound of choppers. The sound of a helicopter can make me put my fist through a wall. I used to laugh with and drink with those guys; they're long since dead. We were just young kids ourselves throwing grenades when we should have been pitching baseballs. I'm still so messed up about it. I still wake up yelling and screaming, reaching for a .38 to protect myself.

That is probably why I loaded up the van last summer with boxes of the Angel Pins I created and a few suitcases of personal items and set out on my self-styled ANGELS ALONG THE WAY GOODWILL TOUR.

It might sound like a big-time fancy tour, like the type some country singer would go on, traveling in a slick looking RV. The truth of the matter was the Angels Along the Way Goodwill Tour "headquarters" was just little ole' me working out of my kitchen using my pantry closets to store Angel Pins. My laundry room hampers separated the poem verses by type. We had no fancy RV, just a bright gold van rented from Budget.

As I prepared for the trip, I sometimes gently put the poems and pins into the hampers. At other times the clunking and thumping sounds reflected my fear, as I plunked them with force. Why in heaven's name am I doing this?

I even felt a little bad - didn't "real moms" baste turkeys, darn socks, fold piles of freshly washed clothes, and mend dresses - in laundry rooms and kitchens?

And here I was attaching Angel Pins to bookmarks, hour after hour, day after day, while other moms melted butter into pans, with the sweet smell of cinnamon wafting through their open windows.

Despite my best efforts, I always seemed to do things differently than others. And as for sewing, well, there's no hope. I am the Queen of uneven stitches.

I wanted to let people know that they are not alone. Maybe the trio of angels could help lonely people beat the blahs. To those clinging to shards of hope, one little Angel Pin attached to an inspirational poem might even offer comfort.

I answered my cell phone and heard a timid voice, it sounded like the type of voice that had misty eyes, on the other end of the line.

My name is Francie. For heaven's sake, I was getting ready to throw the newspaper out. Oh my God, look at this I said out loud. I cut the prayer out and decided to call you.

A Team of Angels for Taking One Day at a Time

At times I need to stop and pray
When I'm confused about my day
Should I do it later, or do it now.
I'm not even sure that I know how.

When I'm upset and don't know why
I pray the Lord will get me by
And send a Team of Angels near
To help me see my problem clear.

My grandson has a serious eating problem. He is going to die if he doesn't lose a lot of weight. We just had a big argument. We don't see eye to eye. This may not be right but I pray to my guardian angel to bang him in the head and knock some sense into him. Her voice trailed off in tearful emotion.

People who felt they were "underdogs" or "losers" called regularly when they were in a crisis of confidence and asked for an angel.

I must have been called "dummy" or "stupid" every day of grade school. People who had been arrested, aimless, addicted and beaten down by life, people with scars on the inside, wanted a reminder that they were "good enough" and something to help them believe. I was

always picked last for teams at recess or not picked at all to play. I wasn't very good at sports or with schoolwork. It still hurts to remember. I hoped that the Team of Angels would cry out to them God has something mighty planned for you. There is something great in you.

Now, I wasn't proclaiming to be "The Great White Hope" or trying to be a traveling evangelist or anything. I was more like a close to penniless pauper marching for the common mom, saying it isn't easy living these days and taking care of a family, especially if you are a mom who isn't very "with-it". What did I know about raising a family anyway? One of my kids had told me that I was "an old-fashioned meanie mother." I was always checking up on them, making them clean up their rooms, do chores, setting curfews and interrogating their dates, "like you are the CIA or something." I wish that I could have been sweet, beautiful and gentle.

And so with my battered suitcase filled with Angel Pins, I began my 7000-mile trek in a gold van rented from Budget to pass out thousands of Angel Pins.

I felt a little sheepish even taking on the task of reaching out to comfort others. It hadn't been that long ago when I was fretting about my twenty-five year marriage ending, a serious illness threatening a loved one, one of my children in a terrible accident, and bad luck seemed to find me at every turn. I was vulnerable and weak for several years and had worn myself to a frazzle. Thinking about those bad times still gives me the willies.

The nightly news broadcasts telling of hostages, terrorists, threats of wars from all borders, not to mention the personal stuff like traces of cancer, and concern over employment, well gee, it can wear a person down.

The kinds of problems that strike when you least expect it can leave even the strongest mom feeling desperately confused and frightened.

Lots of problems like that had haunted me. Everyone knows that you can't get through tough times alone but asking for help was sometimes just too darn embarrassing.

And so I started writing poems, alone in a church, every day, for every feeling I had – a Team of Angels for stress, a Team of Angels for worry, a Team of Angels for depression, a Team of Angels to protect my children, a Team of Angels for serious illness and several hundred others.

I printed the poems on bookmarks. I called them MY TEAM OF ANGEL POEMS and attached a homemade Angel Pin to each one.

As my cell phone rang with messages from people who had read the article, I told each troubled soul that we were staying in a Holiday Inn in North Carolina.

Ryan and I will be eating breakfast at 9 am in the restaurant. Please stop and visit at our table. You can take pins from the basket.

I waited and wondered if anybody would come.

Lucy was the first to arrive, with a crown of white-hair, in a gingham dress, with flat-heeled shoes, bespectacled...a simple lady who looked very kind. Her wrinkled face beamed as she began talking very earnestly –

I had colon cancer and I think one of my daughters is a drug-addict. I am raising eight children under eight years old – the children of my children. My son is in Iraq and his wife just took off leaving the two babies with me. My other daughter-in-law has had three babies with three different guys. The other five little ones just needed a home. I think she is wedded to the bottle rather than to my son and the kids.

Bertha came next, wringing a handkerchief in her hands while her Ked sneakers drummed nervously on the floor. I loved the marvelous color of her hat, covered with beads that looked like a string of colored Christmas lights. She seemed high-strung and spoke rapidly.

My daughter had cancer of the larynx and has an artificial voice box. Her husband was so good to her while she was sick. He was totally paralyzed from an accident. Now she is taking care of him. I worry about her. She feeds him, bathes him and it is starting to wear her down. He can only move two muscles in his whole body, in the corner of his mouth and his eyes. She is in a bad space physically, spiritually and emotionally. She stayed in her room and wouldn't come out for three days. I didn't know where she went -- I hope she can hold out emotionally. I, at my age, don't know if I can handle all of this worry. I feel like I have ten ton of bricks on me.

Carol smiled at me and murmured this may be a stupid question, but are you the Angel Pin lady?

I am really mad at my son, actually I am his guardian. He goes to a reform school and he is home for a weekend pass. He was blitzed with alcohol and pulled a firecracker out on a security guard at a casino. He only has six weeks left to go in his program and then he has his freedom. He is supposed to go to a Narcotics Anonymous and an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting every day. His girlfriend told me he didn't go today and he isn't home. He has an attitude problem. Sometimes, he just acts too big for his britches. When I was his age, I did as I was bid. He will get extra time if he doesn't do the classes. Well, I will bet my bottom dollar that there will be less of his shenanigans with these angels in my pocket.

I took a break to run to the ladies room and in my haste, I dropped a basket of Angel Pins. A kind lady stooped down and helped me pick up them up. I guess you were meant to have them. She thanked me and walked away.

I wandered back to the restaurant praying silently Please bless those little children, and the teenage boy, and the sick couple. Thank you for giving me this project but I need help. A pang of enormous self-doubt was wadded in the pit of my stomach and I still had a few weeks of traveling to go. If you want me to continue to do this, please give me a sign. If I have faltered and I am totally off- track thinking this is Your Will, please send me in a different direction. God, if you want me to be employed, please give me a real job.

While eating my muffin, the lady who helped me pick up the fallen pins stopped at our table, is this a grassroots project? I told her a little about what we were doing in her town. She was the restaurant manager. She was wearing her pin and brought the waiters and waitresses over to chat and look through the basket filled with my poems and pins. Lots of people gathered around reading the poem:

A TEAM OF ANGELS TO PROTECT MY LOVED ONES

Please send a Team of Angels, Lord
To watch my loved ones dear.
To guard them and protect them
When they are far or near.

I worry about the world, Dear Lord
In which we all now live.
A blessed Team of Angels
Is the best gift I can give.

They attached the lapel pin to their uniforms and tucked the poem in their pockets. I watched as the manager passed out pins to customers.

I overheard a woman at the next table ask, Is she just giving them away? How is she making any money?

She looked at me with wary eyes. I smiled. I knew I wanted to talk to her –we were connected in some way. She leaned over and whispered – I'll tell you why I need these angels. I rent a room from my aunt and she is going to sell the house and move to a nursing home. She has a little bit of dementia. I don't know where I will go. She used to take me to my doctor's appointments and to the store. Now my aunt is crippled. I don't think she will walk again. Where will I live?

I answered my cell phone: I need a circle of angels. I need even more than a team. I know that God put that newspaper in my hand this morning. I am giving my granddaughter to God. She can't get along with people. She doesn't work and she has no insurance. She is a time bomb waiting to explode. I wish she would get help but she says she doesn't need it. He gave her to me after my daughter passed away. I wear oxygen and I went to church today. I was thinking about your poem A TEAM OF ANGELS FOR TAKING ONE DAY AT A

WHAT CAN GOD DO WITH A WOMAN LIKE ME?

TIME. She breaks my heart but I know God loves her more than I do. Sometimes I ask God to stop the world, I want to get off. I always wonder when the ball is going to drop again.

It was time to pay our check for our breakfast. Ryan and I had probably charged about twenty dollars and all of the ladies who visited at the table had coffee, orange juice and muffins. God, please give me one little sign. The manager came over and said. “Your breakfast is on the house – no charge” and the hotel manager gave us our room for free. I stared at the manager in stunned disbelief. You can’t beat the price at the Holiday Inn!