

Chapter 6

That's What Forever's For

It was in the midst of this challenging time that my father was asked to oversee a small farming operation in the rural outskirts of Salt Lake... a small town named Riverton. The commute and the farming would be very time-consuming for him. It became necessary for my parents to move there where they could live on the property.

Since there wasn't a home suitable for Mom and Dad to live in on the farm itself, they decided to build a home right next to it. There was an old wood frame house already on the property, but it wasn't very habitable. If it was around today, it would probably be condemned. But, Lee thought that with a little work it could be made livable... even comfortable. We asked Dad what was going to happen to the old farm house, and if it would be possible for us to fix it up and live in it. Dad did some checking with the owner of the farm, and it was decided that we could live there. In exchange for rent, Lee would be required to assist with the farm chores. Lee was very happy about this. We thought that this could really help us get back on our feet. I felt like it was an answer to our prayers.

This small farming community was a great place to raise a family. It was out in the country, away from the fast pace of the big city... ideal for children to grow up closer to nature and animals and such.

Shortly after arriving, I became good friends with a lady who lived only short distance from our new home. Her name was Janice Nielsen. We met in church and very quickly developed a close friendship. She also had two small children who were very close in age to my children, so, we immediately had a lot in common. She told me that her husband also worked in construction, but since he traveled quite a lot I hadn't yet met him.

In the course of our conversation, I asked what his name was, and she said his name was Lester. I couldn't believe it. "Is that the same Lester who went to Granite High School?" I asked. She told me it was and I started to laugh. "I've known him ever since we were little kids. We went to all the same schools together," I said. I was so happy to find out that I knew some of the people who were going to be my neighbors.

We soon made some other friends in that area, friends that we've stayed close to for many, many years. Two other families in particular, who were our same ages and who also had children the same age as ours, were Paul and Kathy Cieslewicz, and Steve and Sheri Young. Over the next several years, we would all become very close.

Our husbands were all in the construction industry, and we all attended the same little church together. I felt a little bit like I'd found a home in Mayberry. It was a good time in our lives.

I said we all attended church together... that's not quite true. Because of the hard times we'd been through, and the long hours that Lee had to work just to try to take care of our little family, he had quit attending church. There were other factors that contributed to his state of mind as well. He just couldn't accept the fact that a just God would require so much of us and allow so much pain and suffering and struggles to happen to our family when we'd tried so hard to do what was right. He just didn't believe it was fair, and I'll have to admit, at times it was something I struggled with as well.

But, I kept going to church just the same. The comfort and friendships I found there helped me cope better with all the things that were happening in our lives. Still, going to church without Lee was very difficult. All my other friends were there with their husbands, and I wanted so very much, for Lee to be there with me.

My heart ached for Lee and I pleaded with God to help him somehow. I prayed that his heart would be touched and that he would understand that these trials weren't a punishment, nor were they permanent. But if we remained faithful, I believed that someday things would all work out for the best... even if it wasn't in this mortal life. I remember praying to God and telling Him that I'd do anything if only He'd touch Lee's heart and bring him back. I told Him that I would accept and endure anything he required of me, in order to make our little family a forever family.

Lee really liked living on the farm. The open spaces and fresh air seemed to rejuvenate his spirits, and his health improved. I used to watch him walk up and down the farm road with our little boys tagging along behind him as he irrigated the rows of crops and helped Dad run the farm. He adored our two little boys, and life seemed to be getting better for us.

By now, I was pregnant with our third child, another little boy, whom we decided we would name Josh. But something wasn't right, and I was having dreams

about a baby dying. It disturbed me deeply. I was terrified that these might be premonitions.

One night I woke up just sobbing. Lee asked me what was wrong. I told him about my dreams and that I was concerned for the safety of our baby. He told me not to worry and assured me that everything would be all right. I wondered if he really believed that, given our past history.

Two weeks from the day I was supposed to deliver our third child I decided to walk over to my mother's house and visit her. The morning was bitter cold, and the walks were very icy. We had a pleasant visit, and then I started to feel a bit woozy. I gave Mom a hug good-bye and walked out the door. That was the last thing I remembered. I apparently passed out, slipped, and fell down the stairs, breaking my ankle in the process. When I came to, I was in the hospital. I was terribly worried that I may have landed on my baby and hurt him when I fell.

They told me an ambulance had rushed me to the hospital where doctors examined me and discovered that I'd broken my ankle. It was swollen and throbbing, but informed me that since I was about to have my baby, and would be having the epidural block, they couldn't put a cast on my foot at this time.

"You'll just have to go home, put your foot up, and stay quiet for a while until this baby comes," the doctor said.

"What about my baby?" I asked. "I'm afraid that I may have fallen on him and hurt him. Can you tell if he's all right?"

He listened to my baby's heartbeat with his stethoscope and assured me that everything seemed to be fine. He told me to just go home, get plenty of rest, and take care of myself.

The doctor didn't want our baby to be born yet, but he didn't want me to carry him any longer than was necessary either. Neither of us wanted another ten-pounder born. He said that would just be too hard on me. He told me to go home and rest for two weeks. Then they would take the baby.

I lay in bed in pain for days. These doctors knew from my past births that I couldn't do the labor on my own, and they would have to administer "pit drops" again. Having babies was really, really hard on me.

I woke up one morning, and the baby felt different. I could tell something was wrong. I called Mom and said "Something's wrong with my baby... he's not moving like he should be." They rushed me to the hospital again. His heartbeat was very faint.

Mom called my "church leader" Brent Booth and told him what was happening. He picked up my father and hurried to the hospital. When they arrived, Lee and Doctor Fitzgerald were already waiting for them.

When Doctor Fitzgerald came into the room, my father asked him if there was enough time to give me a blessing, to which he replied, "There's always enough time for a blessing."

In our church, we believe very strongly in faith and the power of prayer, and we believe that blessings can work miracles in people's lives. I very much wanted to receive a blessing at this time.

Brent looked at Lee and said, "Lee, you need to help give your wife this blessing." Lee panicked. He'd never given anyone a blessing before. He didn't feel his faith was strong enough, and he hadn't been going to church. Brent assured him that he would do fine and told him that he would walk him through it.

Brent was very sensitive to Lee, quietly instructing him on the proper way to anoint my head with oil. Lee performed the anointing and my Father gave me the actual blessing. It was very touching and brought a lot of comfort to my soul.

When the blessing was finished, I looked up at Lee... tears were streaming down his face. I remember the words that were spoken. Never did it state that the baby would be all right, but he did say that we would have an understanding of what was happening and an assurance that things would be all right in the eternities.

My other babies had taken hours to deliver, with many people assisting... pushing, pulling, and doing for me what my own body couldn't do. This birth was very different. As soon as dad finished giving me the blessing, baby Josh was born. There was no assistance needed, and I never felt any pain.

I can still see that beautiful little baby... his long eyelashes lying on his chubby little round cheeks. He was such an angel. But he didn't appear to be breathing. The doctors quickly snatched him up and hurried off to the ICU. Lee went with them. The doctors took care of me and tried to make sure I was comfortable. Then they put my foot in a cast. When they were finished, they left the room and told me to get some rest. I couldn't sleep until I knew my baby would be all right. I laid there and prayed.

After some time, Lee came in to see me. I could tell he'd been crying. He walked over to me, took my hand, and told me that our little baby Josh had died.

My heart sunk. I hadn't even had the chance to hold him or kiss him, and now it was too late. My nightmares had become reality.

Then he told me something that seemed to ease some of the pain, something I hadn't expected to hear, that brought hope back into my heart. He said that he felt very strongly that Josh had been sent from God to deliver a message to him. Now he had my full attention. He continued, "I feel like he was sent to give me a message to straighten up and live right so we could be together as a family forever."

Suddenly, all the pain and sorrow I believed would consume and destroy me was tempered by words from my husband and best friend. These were the very words that I prayed to God I would one day hear from his lips. I knew it was a miracle, and silently I thanked God that He had touched Lee's heart and brought him back to me.

During this very emotional time, Lee and I were finally able to communicate the deepest feelings of our hearts. He told me that he knew that this little baby had returned home to Heavenly Father, and that if he ever wanted to see him again, if he ever wanted to be a part of his life, he had to make some changes in his own life.

I was so ill that I couldn't leave the hospital. Lee had to make all the funeral arrangements by himself. He went to the store and bought a little outfit, and my mom made a blanket to wrap him up in. Lee picked out a coffin and worked with the people at the mortuary to arrange for his burial. I was very sad that I couldn't be included in baby Josh's funeral preparations.

As a result of how these events unfolded, I developed what is called "***aching arm syndrome.***" I knew that Lee's mom and dad had both been able to hold my baby, my mom and dad held him, Lee held him, but no one had even thought to offer to let me hold him... they just took him away to the funeral home. My heart felt so empty. My family and some of our friends helped us with the funeral. My Uncle Dirk and Grandma Anjewierden paid for the headstone on which was engraved a little sleeping angel, leaning against some candles. We believed Josh really was our little angel.

We held a small funeral service at the cemetery, just for close friends and family. The doctors allowed me to leave the hospital, just long enough to attend. I walked into the funeral home on crutches. It was very painful physically, but when I saw that little coffin and my beautiful little baby lying inside, the emotional pain was almost more than I could bear.

The lid had been left open so I could see him one more time. He looked so beautiful... so peaceful. They'd arranged him in such a way that it looked like he was lying asleep in his crib. I still hadn't held him, and I wanted more than anything to lift him up and hold him close.

I walked over to his little coffin and reached in to lift him up. People who were there gasped. Then they started to sob, some uncontrollably. I decided it might be more than some of them could handle if I were to pick him up and give him a hug, so instead, I just touched his little cheek, told him I loved him, and closed the lid.

Lee picked up the coffin, and together we walked across the cemetery lawn to the grave site. There we had a family prayer. This was really hard, not just for Lee and me, but for all of the people who were there.

Some were very upset to see me in the condition I was in, having to bury my baby. I can't really explain it, but even at this very difficult time, I felt a peace in my heart that I can't describe. I knew that this special little child had come down to Earth to help make our family an eternal family, and I was determined that his sacrifice would not be in vain.

I noticed that Lee became much more interested in church and spiritual matters after this experience. He had more of an understanding of the truly important things of life, such as family and friends, and it became much more apparent because of the many that rallied around us in this, our hour of need.

About a year passed, and things were going much better for us. The boys were growing up and Lee was having so much fun with them. We were very involved with all our friends and keeping busy in our church. Once again, we found ourselves expecting another baby. I hoped that this birth would go more smoothly than the previous ones had. I hoped that this time, we would get a little girl, as this was *necessarily* going to be our last child.