



*Photo by John Rottet*

## **Giving Voice to Those Silenced by Abuse**

### **The Story of Danita Davis**

*By Mandy Locke*

**D**anita Davis knows the burden of a secret. During a decade of abuse, she hid a slashed finger, a fractured pelvic bone, cigarette burns on her forearm—injuries unleashed by a man she had once loved enough to marry. It was a nurse at a hospital emergency room who detected Davis's secret and insisted she flee her abusive marriage. That was nearly twenty years ago, the span of her youngest daughter's life. Since then, Davis has been shouting her long-kept secret from stages and lecterns in hopes of helping other battered partners. "I hear the voices of domestic violence victims, and they need to be heard by others," Davis says. "God saved me for this reason." Davis, a Durham, North Carolina, native, dropped out of college in Maryland when her parents died in a car crash. She became a guardian to her brothers, the youngest still in diapers. She settled down, married her high school sweetheart and started a new family of her own. At 23, she was a mother to three girls, surrogate to a brother, and walking on eggshells through the home they all shared.

Her marriage and her eventual desperate escape shape most everything in Davis's life. It colored her prayers, crippled her nursing career, and inspired her new career helping victims of domestic violence.

In 2003, Davis transformed the years she spent beaten and terrified into powerful performances that have inspired other battered partners to gather the courage to leave. "Storms of Life" is a raw collection of poetry, songs, and dialogue so disturbing and realistic that some domestic violence victims can't sit through the entire show.

Davis had never written a poem before; she felt something bigger than she moving the pen the day she began writing "Storms of Life." For inspiration, she turned to a volume of journals she began keeping after she left her husband.

In October 2008, Davis introduced "Hear Them" at a vigil dedicated to the victims who died in combat with those they once loved, capturing the turmoil other victims have shared with Davis through her advocacy work against domestic violence.

### **Two Different Danitas**

It's hard to picture Davis fearing anyone. She's a straight-talking grandmother who insists visitors leave their shoes on a mat by the door. Instead of a handshake, she greets with a full-body hug. She named her Chihuahua "Killer." Her smile is wide and warm. But as a young bride, Davis locked herself in bathrooms, her pregnant belly aching from strikes with a two-by-four. She jumped through a bedroom window, fleeing the gun her husband had pointed at her. And after she had the courage to leave, her estranged husband kidnapped her family, holding a gun to her young brother's head, threatening to kill him and their daughters as Davis looked on. Afterward, Davis says, her husband was committed to a psychiatric hospital but is now free. Davis says she no longer fears him and has found a way to forgive him. That graciousness, advocates say, is part of what makes her testimony so startling and powerful.

"Her journey is so spiritual and it involved forgiveness," said Marie

Brodie, an advocate who met Davis when she worked at the N.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. “She never dictates that to other survivors, but she lets them know it’s possible.” Davis admits that forgiveness took time. Her marriage cost her much, including a long-coveted career in nursing. Davis’s former husband went to UNC Hospitals, gun in hand, to stalk her one day. She lost her job when supervisors decided her estranged husband could endanger patients. With that, she lost a scholarship to study nursing at the university. Davis’s travails enable her to capture the attention of other victims, advocates say.


### Beyond Her Own Pain

“She puts a face on domestic violence,” said Aurelia Sands Belle, executive director of Durham Crisis Center. “She’s been able to work beyond her own pain. She gives women hope that they can not only survive but can get beyond it and make it.”

Davis sought emergency shelter at the center in the late 1980s. It took her three tries to leave her husband. A devout Christian, she feared betraying the sanctity of marriage. She worried about her three girls growing up without a father. Telling stories of her marriage still makes Davis shudder. But she tells them, again and again, to give words to the silent embarrassment of other victims. “I’ve revealed my shame, my pain to help them be free,” Davis says. “I was so ashamed, so afraid of what my husband would do if I told the truth.”

Davis is now happily married to a gentle man; a guy she liked in junior high school but never let him know. Reintroduced by a friend years later, Jeffrey Davis stepped in as a surrogate father when Davis’s girls were young. It took her two years before she agreed to have a date with him, another two before she agreed to marry again.

For Davis, it is the bridge between leaving an abusive partner and finding happiness again that

eludes most domestic violence survivors. Crisis programs shelter women in immediate danger and help them stand on their own those first few months. It is the lonely, sleepless nights years later, during which mothers blame themselves for the emotional scars on their children, that Davis wants to help women conquer. “It is so hard to love yourself again,” Davis says, “but you can’t move on unless you do.” She leads workshops in which she guides women through the steps she believes they must navigate to move on: forgiving themselves, forgiving their abuser, loving the parts that remain. 

Mandy Locke is a *News & Observer* staff reporter. This story was originally published in the *News & Observer* on October 12, 2008, and is reprinted with permission from the *News & Observer* of Raleigh, North Carolina.

*For information on Danita Davis’s work on domestic violence recovery, see <http://tieresourcecentersinc.org>.*

## What Would You Do?



By Kristen MacFarlane

Last fall, a well-known pastor infamously blamed Haitians for the devastating earthquake that slaughtered thousands. I remember thinking at the time that this was ridiculous—who would blame a victim and to what end? Older and wiser now, I can answer both questions: all of us and for many reasons. Most obviously, blaming the victim lets us off the moral hook; we need not get involved. More subtly, it strokes our pride—I have done as I ought to have done, and not done that which I ought not to have done, therefore I am well. Subtler still, and even more powerful, blaming the victim gives us the assurance that we are safe from the victim’s plight, that we’ve made no pact

with the devil and therefore no earthquake will destroy us. We’ve raised our children well, therefore they will not use drugs. We are intelligent people with proper self-esteem and a good grasp of healthy human interactions, therefore we are not the victims of domestic violence. That was me, twenty years ago.

The loss of my only son’s teen years has been, perhaps, the bitterest blow of the multitude that followed my former husband’s decline into abuse and mental illness. My thoughts went back to Scott’s eighth birthday party. As with all my kids’ birthdays, I’d planned it with him for weeks in advance—he’d chosen a theme, we’d made invitations, a piñata, and a dino-

saur cake. We’d spent what to us was a good chunk of money, and I’d spent hours arranging the day—food, party games, guests. On the big day, I was running frantic as always and my husband Pete had come to be worse than no help.

Pete had brought the balloons and the children, including the two birthday girls, home a half an hour late for their two-hour party. We’d had to start without them, and I was whirling about, trying to make sure my four girls and their brother and his guests had fun. I was inside getting cake and ice cream together, and the boys were outside playing. All of a sudden, a little friend came running in crying that Scott had hurt him with a stick in

a game they were playing. Pete charged out the door and yelled with fury at the birthday boy, in front of his friends: “You stupid s—!”

That moment haunts me. Why didn’t I humiliate Pete for his outburst, exile him from the party, and try to salvage the day for my son? I’m sure the reader is clear in her mind that she’d handle this just so—give the man an ultimatum, tell the kids that *he* was the stupid s—, file for divorce. I know I would have been sure I’d do that. I despise myself for it now. I called Pete aside, told him not to speak that way to our son, and went out and comforted and reassured Scott. All quietly, as if not much had happened, and then I went on as if this were normal.

The party, of course, was ruined. Looking back, I believe this was Pete’s intent. But I was thinking about my reaction and how people view women whose husbands terrorize them and their family. So often there’s anger and blame directed at the abused wife or a condescending wish to instruct her in proper thinking and behavior. And sometimes she merits these reactions. There are women who, for whatever reasons, are part of a two-part codependency with an abuser. But what if this is not your typical case? What if the typical abused woman looks more like you? I remember, having rid the home of my husband, telling people this wasn’t the “typical” abusive household. After all, my kids and I weren’t battered, and I lacked neither the conviction nor the courage to stand up, ultimately, to their father. (I now wonder how much longer it would have taken Pete to expunge the last of those from my spirit. I was amazed, by the end, at how crushed I’d become without recognizing it).

Then I went to court to fight for full custody and read the domestic violence literature I found there. I was stunned, reading the list of typical abusive tactics:

**Blocks doorway.** When Pete was acting up and I went to call someone to whom he was accountable—a therapist, pastor, his family, or a friend—it was not unusual for him to block my way. I’d never seen a list of classic abusive behavior. I knew this was obnoxious, but since my husband was often gone and I had the phone then, I didn’t take this as seriously as I ought to have done.

**Hurts pets.** When Pete tossed the kitten over the child-gate at the head of the stairs, and again when he tossed it down the back stairs, the poor thing landed on its feet and ran, uninjured. But it was certainly scared. Why had Pete done this? Both times I was shocked and angry and read him the riot act. Again, two typical abuser tactics were helpful to him: he minimized what he’d done, and he pushed the envelope only so far and no farther by not actually injuring the pet. Yet.

**Drives recklessly.** It was not until long afterwards that my son told me that on an occasion when I’d pushed him to spend some time with his dad doing errands, Pete had driven eighty miles an hour down local roads. I hadn’t understood why Scott was so reluctant to be alone with his father, because Pete’s behavior toward the children when I was absent was different from his behavior when I was present. Young children assume the other parent knows what is happening, but there were many things I never learned until years after I kicked Pete out.

**Throws or breaks things.** Why, in the middle of a discussion in his office, did Pete suddenly become angry beyond the magnitude of the disagreement and smash the ice bucket into the wall? Again, I didn’t connect the dots. Abuse at first appears as a series of seemingly random incidents, none of which in itself would be cause for serious alarm. I took him to task for ruining my family hand-me-down, a small luxury I could not replace. I also was

upset at the softball-sized dent in the wall, which, again minimizing, he said would be a snap to fix. I didn’t realize then that the message was, “I may well lose my temper and do this to you or our children.” That message comes, subconsciously, with time, when you realize that you feel threatened, that you’ve felt threatened for some time, but that you can’t put your finger on just why or when it started.

**Withholds money.** It was literally years after our divorce that I put this one together—my husband’s inability to earn even a poverty-level income in his business yet his refusal to take a job was more than unintended failure on his part. Keeping us poor was an excellent control mechanism, which he did without doing the more obvious tactics that other abusers do—allowances, separate checking accounts (as in the account an acquaintance could never access, and so she and her children went hungry when “her” money ran out, while the main family breadwinner retained “his” money), living well while insisting that the family lives poorly (as in the acquaintance whose husband breakfasted every morning on fresh orange juice and waffles while his wife and sons had Tang and instant oatmeal). Our family ended up suffering the stresses and indignities of poverty without the ability to point the finger at him; after all, he was living meagerly along with us and was doing his “best” to work hard for us.


On the list went, with item after item jogging my memory of another incident—most minor, some major. Most of the abuse characteristics the court listed applied to my family. I was the “typical” abused woman. It wasn’t until years later that a counselor shed light on this for me: there is no “typical” abused woman, but there are typical abusers. The characteristics of abusive people and the dynamics they produce are chillingly similar. When you, looking on, blame the

victim, you join her abuser—he has been blaming her, too.

But back to my premise: Am I so unlike you, reader? Could you have seen the end from the beginning? At what point would you, unlike the proverbial frog in heated water, have leapt from the pot? Would you divorce your spouse because he tossed the family pet, threw an ice bucket at the wall, failed to earn enough money? Even with major incidents, such as the unforgivable humiliation of a child on his birthday, can you see yourself before a judge, citing this as the reason for divorce? Would your pastor give you his blessing? Would your parents understand and offer sacrificial financial support? Would you deprive your children of growing up with a father they all loved, despite such despicable outbursts—who made beautiful sandcastles with them on the

beach, all of them so happy to bask in Daddy's love and attention? And where would you go? Would your children lose their home, their school, their friends, your presence in the home as you worked multiple jobs? And what would be the terms of this divorce anyway? Would you be forced to give your children into this man's unsupervised care for weekend visitations? And without your presence as a restraining force, what might he say or do to them? Sometimes this very reason keeps us in the same house as the abuser—we know there may be no way to protect our children in the event of a divorce. I can remember often having this perverse thought: "If he were anyone but their father, I would never allow him to speak to them like that!" Of course, Pete's being their father was what made speaking to his children like

that so much more damaging. But it was also the very thing that made it so hard to prevent. Friends or even family can be cut off (I've done both), but a parent can't be stopped, short of divorce with full custody and no visitation rights—quite the trick for anyone to obtain, even if she wanted it. Never mind how the children react to such a thing.

When I sent money to Haiti for aid in the earthquake aftermath, it went through a wonderful Christian relief and development organization. They recognize that all people are created in God's image but that we also all are fallen creatures. I can count on this Christian agency to sort out how best to help and to do it in a way that acknowledges Haitians' ability, given that help, to govern their lives well. 



## Engaging Christians in Ending Domestic Abuse

By *Natalie Collins*

**W**hen there is an abusive man in her home, a woman becomes a widow and her children become orphans. She is abused and oppressed, denied justice by a system built on patriarchy and the inequality of women.

In Isaiah 1:17, God gave us this mandate, "Learn to do good. Seek justice. Help the oppressed. Defend the cause of orphans. Fight for the rights of widows." James states, "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress."

Throughout history, who has fought for the rights of the widow—that is, a woman suffering domestic abuse? Who has defended the cause of the orphans—the children, living in homes where their father abuses their mother? Who has sought justice for abused women and looked after them

in their distress? The answer should be God's people the church. This, however, has often not been the case. In fact, God's people have often been responsible for the perpetuating of theology that not only does not help these widows and orphans but causes them to suffer abuse, to stay silent and not seek justice. The reality is that the church could be rightly accused of enabling oppression, facilitating injustice, and causing widows and orphans further distress.

How can the church become the answer? How can we, God's people, live out the mandate of Isaiah 1:17? The answer lies in the first word: we have to *learn* to do good. That is why Faith and Freedom is organizing the Bringing Hope Conference on June 26, 2010, in Colchester, England—to facilitate education about domestic abuse, learning to understand and

support those who are suffering and how to live out this mandate. It will be an inspirational day with outstanding speakers including Dr. Elaine Storkey and Dr. Catherine Clark Kroeger, and the performance of an enlightening theater production, "Lady in Red." It will also be the public launch of Restored, a groundbreaking new international alliance of Christians ending violence against women.

Even though it may be true that very often the church has not been the answer for those who are suffering domestic abuse, there are amazing individuals who have listened to God and have pioneered projects and initiatives—to defend the "orphans" and fight for the "widows" suffering from domestic abuse. These individuals have walked a lonely path, often standing against those in the church who should have helped them.

Through supporting the development of Restored and working with Faith and Freedom, God has brought me into contact with many of these organizations, who are beginning to

unite and become something bigger, something louder, something that can enable the rest of the church to learn how to become the answer. ☞

*For information, visit [www.faihandfreedom.webs.com/conference.htm](http://www.faihandfreedom.webs.com/conference.htm).  
Natalie Collins is the coordinator for Faith and Freedom in the United Kingdom.*

**PASCH 2011 Conference**  
**Justice for All: Overcoming Barriers to**  
**Peace and Safety in the Christian Home**

May 13–15, 2011  
Columbia Bible College  
Abbotsford (Vancouver) British Columbia, Canada

**P**ASCH invites session and paper proposals for our fifth conference to be held in Abbotsford, British Columbia. The conference will be a venue for the discussion of strategies, research projects, best practices, legal processes, and therapeutic initiatives related to creating peace and safety in the Christian home, Christian responses to wife abuse, and other forms of domestic violence. Come and join with other victim/survivors, researchers, theologians, therapists, pastors, social activists, community advocates, shelter workers, and faith community members as we network to respond to the needs of victims of domestic violence and to promote healthy, peaceful family living. Although a wide range of session and paper topics are encouraged, we especially solicit those concerned with the following:

- Faith-based batterer intervention programs;
- The impact of domestic violence on children;
- Therapeutic strategies for facilitating hope and healing for victims;
- Biblical mandate for peace and safety in the home;
- Safety planning;
- Pastoral leadership in understanding and addressing violence in families of faith;
- Justice system responses to domestic violence;
- Pastoral counseling for victims and those who act violently;
- Narratives of pain and despair of victims;
- Bridge building between sacred and secular agencies;
- Pragmatic strategies for assisting families in crisis;
- Liturgy and resources for individuals and congregations.

Paper Proposals (title and 200-word abstract) are due by October 31, 2010, and Session Proposals (title and description) are due by September 30, 2010. Send proposals to: Dr. Barbara Fisher-Townsend, Program Chair, 7 Duke Street, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada E3A 4J4 (506-453-7826); [fisher.townsend@unb.ca](mailto:fisher.townsend@unb.ca).

## **No Shadow of Turning**

*By Patricia Erlandsen*

*God's character is immutable.*

*The Father of the heavenly lights does not change like shifting shadows.*

**P**eople who never truly experience the grace and faithfulness of God will undoubtedly misinterpret God's character. One example of this can be seen where God's ways and character are interpreted through cultural lenses; where this occurs gender relationships will undoubtedly be reflected in a distorted way.

*Let God be true and every person a liar.*

Some become confused because they have been taught by seemingly godly and intelligent people that women are not equal with men, that men are “over” women and that women lack spiritual authority and need a man to “cover” them to “keep them safe,” and that they are commanded by God to love and obey their husbands. These people read the Scriptures and it seems to be so. However, it makes God appear to be sexist and unfair. Therefore, all teachings we receive can and should be tested against what the Scriptures say about God. When we read the Gospels we see that Jesus showed us what God is like. There we will discover that the One True and Living God is neither unjust nor sexist; God hates unequal balances and weights. The Law of the Lord is pure; our God is holy; therefore, anyone who taints the Word of God by interpreting it in a sexist way has a distorted view of God, interpreting God through their cultural lenses: in their own image and likeness.

*Where love abounds, grace does much more abound.*

As you search, the day will come when you will receive greater understanding and when greater clarity is revealed to you of God’s just balances and weights, that we are all one in Christ. Become an ambassador for Christ, representing God in a true light. Go and tell others who have also suffered from God’s character being maligned. Share what you know about the good news of God’s equality and God will give the increase. Always trust in the goodness and in the love of God.

*God’s desire is that the people of God live in peace. ❧*



## Peace Can Be Yours, Too!

*By Joy Matos*

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me...and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matt 11:28–30)*

I had been a Christian virtually all of my life, had graduated from Bible college, and had been involved in ministry, and still somehow I never quite personally understood the meaning of this verse. Jesus said it, so it must be true—for someone else.

For me, being a follower of Jesus meant “loving others”—that is, always trying to make *other* people’s lives easier and better no matter the cost to me, especially my husband. I wanted to be the “perfect wife” and helpmate—and this (as I was taught) translated into “submission.”

Unfortunately, those misguided understandings resulted in my living with the shame and embarrassment of domestic abuse for 26 years. What made it worse was that my abuser was a minister, a man whose preaching and testimony led hundreds to personal commitments of faith in Christ. It took the “perfect storm” in my life

for me to finally break loose from that stronghold and to learn firsthand that Jesus truly desired to give *me* rest and that indeed *his yoke is easy* and *his burden is light*—for me, too.

I had just turned 20 when I married. What had attracted me more than anything else to this man was how much he loved the Lord. I didn’t know any other young man so committed to serving God. He was involved in ministry, sharing his testimony and singing praises to God for what he had done in his life. According to 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” At the time, I thought all that mattered was that he was a Christian who truly “loved God.” The angry rages started within weeks of our wedding. They were often followed by apologies and reminders that he wouldn’t have been so angry if it weren’t for my lighting the match to his fury.

When we first married, I was a student in Bible college; I had felt called to the ministry and had transferred there from NYU in order to prepare. But now I was faced with a less-than-perfect marriage that threatened not only my ideals of a Christian family but my very calling. I remember walking around the college campus, not knowing to whom to turn and being too embarrassed and afraid to share anything with anyone. One of my fellow students, a young woman who had been divorced prior to her coming to know the Lord, had been told by denominational authorities that she would be ineligible for ministerial credentials (or even church leadership) because of that divorce. Hearing this woman’s story reinforced my sense of isolation. I decided to simply trust God for a miracle. After all, we were both Christians—Christians called to ministry; certainly, God would do a miracle.

The angry rages filled with insults and threats continued for the next 26 years—through his Bible college and seminary days and through decades of ministry.

The kids and I lived on eggshells. We would never know when peace would turn to chaos. What made life most difficult was that he had his office in our home, and he was rarely away from the house for more than a few hours at a time. We didn't have close friends, and the kids avoided having friends come over because of his frequent tirades. No one really knew what our home life was like.

Actively involved in church ministry, I hated living a double life. But then, what else could I do? Didn't God say divorce was wrong? Wasn't the wife supposed to submit to her husband? Wasn't the husband (especially a minister who was used of God in ministry to bless so many) the head of the family? Wouldn't God's name be dishonored if it became known that a minister was abusive? Wouldn't it be disloyal of me to reveal this to "outsiders"? If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all—isn't that the rule? How then could I possibly say anything "negative" about my husband or our family life? The problem must be with me, right? Besides all that, how could I support three young children all alone? What kind of job could I get with a bachelor's degree in Bible? I had no family to turn to, no close friends, and constant threats from my husband that if he "went down" he'd take the family down with him.

I felt trapped. I continued to cry out to God for a miraculous deliverance. Surely, God would do something!

Finally, over the years, others outside our home began recognizing signs that something was wrong. I began to realize that I wasn't the one to blame for the chaos in our home. Despite all of this, it took "the perfect

storm" years later for me to finally declare, "Enough!"

In the midst of that perfect storm, the Lord led me to a pastor who empowered me to seek and follow God's peace—no matter what anyone else might think or say. Colossians 3:15 came alive for me as I learned to apply its words to my life: "And let the peace from Christ rule in your hearts to which as one body you were also called."

I began to recognize for the first



time that "duty" had always trumped peace in my life. I had failed to recognize that God had given me *peace* as my guide, but I ignored it when the "should's," "have-to's," or "must's" called. At this time I began to examine my life, and as I looked back I began to see that in every bad decision I had ever made, I had ignored the blaring warning signal of discomfort and unrest—the *lack of peace*.

Armed now with the Spirit of peace, I sought the counsel of a Christian therapist and learned how to set appropriate boundaries. The heavy burden of responsibility for my husband's choices and actions began to fall away. I began to realize that it was never God who had placed those burdens on me; I had taken them on of my own volition. That was the reason I had not known "the rest" God offered me through Jesus. That was the reason why the burden was too heavy for me to bear. God never calls us to take responsibility for the choices and actions of others. Rather than helping, I had been enabling my husband to continue the destructive behavior.

It was during this time that I began to allow God to demonstrate his care toward me. Before this, I was the one taking care of everyone and everything else. Now God was taking care of me. All the things that were beyond my ability or control, God handled far better than I ever could have.

I had always been fearful of confiding to anyone what was going on. But when the perfect storm struck and I let go, God was there to catch me. He surrounded me with supportive people—a pastor I'd never met before, my boss, my sister, a friend.

He provided financial resources to keep my home and kids safe and secure. He allayed my fears. For the first time in my adult life, *his yoke became easy and his burden light*. I experienced his love and care. God was there for me in a way I'd never known before!

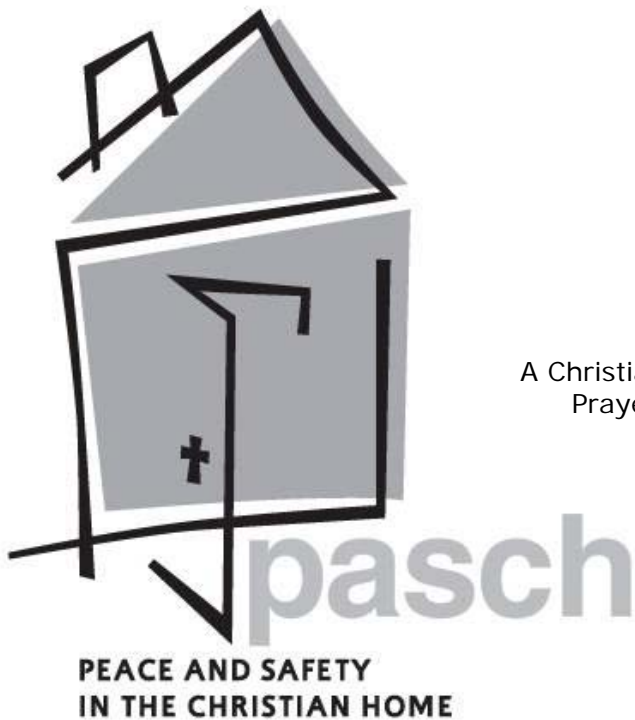
The past four-plus years have by no means been an easy journey. They have been filled with struggles from within and from without. I had to work through all the "should's," "must's," "have-to's," and "but's" engrained in me from youth, both from my upbringing and the church. God stripped away the old wineskins and helped me embrace the new. This period has been the most painful and yet the most richly rewarding of my life. For the first time in my life, I knew God loved me, too. God's promise stands true:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isa. 43:2ff)

The good news is we don't have to face our burdens alone! ❧



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## **Peace and Safety in the Christian Home (PASCH)**

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