

Trauma

I wasn't ever a religious person. I didn't believe in God, and I never went to church. Did that make me a bad person? I didn't think so.

I want to tell you how God found me.

I'm a thirty-three year old woman who has been a chemistry teacher for eleven years. And I'm a good one. I take my job seriously, and I give my time to any student willing to ask for extra help. Even former students.

So when Scott, an old student of mine and a good friend, asked for some help with his third-year college chemistry course, I had to say yes.

He was having real difficulties, so we decided together that I would visit him at the college one a week in the evening, and we would go over the past week's material to make sure he understood it thoroughly. This was actually more work for me than it might seem, because the college was located about two hours from where I lived. But I needed to buy groceries, and there was a Tim Horton's there, so how could I say no?

The first few weekly sessions went pretty well. Scott was working hard, but there were some concepts he wasn't getting. He was really grateful for the help. Like I said, we were close friends. On some trips my husband Todd came with me, although he usually shopped while I was helping Scott.

Did I mention that Scott was a Christian? No? Well, it didn't matter then. Things like that weren't important to me.

The third evening went just as well. Scott was getting it. In two weeks he would have to write his mid-term exam, and we wanted to make sure he was ready. But Scott had a question.

"Barbara, you're putting a lot of time in with all this help you're giving me, and it's expensive, you having to drive down here every week. I know we're friends, but ... why do you do it?"

I thought carefully before I answered. "Scott, I've known you since you were in grade five, and you were always my favourite student. And I know your parents ... they're really nice. And you're a friend. I wanted to help you."

"Well, I really appreciate it. If I pass this exam ..."

"*When* you pass this exam, Scott."

"OK, *when* I pass the exam ... I'd like to do something nice for you. My parents suggested I invite you to our church one Sunday. What do you think?"

That didn't sit very well with me. "Scott ... you know I don't ..."

"I know, Barbara. You don't believe in God. But I think you'll have a good time anyway. Will you come? Say yes!"

I agreed, but I think I had no intention of actually following through with it. Church wasn't my thing.

On the last evening I was a little late arriving at the college; the roads were icy, it was snowing heavily, and I was pretty tired. But Scott had his exam the next day, so it was important I be there.

When we were done, I wished Scott good luck on his exam, and asked him to phone me the next day after he found out his results. I said goodbye and headed out to my car.

That's the last thing I remember from that evening. I have been told that somewhere between the college and my home, my car slid on an icy patch of road and I hit a pick-up truck coming the other way.

Head-on collisions aren't fun. My injuries were apparently quite serious; after the ambulance delivered me to the hospital, I had to be airlifted to the nearest trauma center five hundred kilometres or so south.

When the doctors took a look at me, they discovered that, while some of my injuries were bad, I would heal up quite nicely. But my head was bad. Severe trauma, concussion, and coma.

The next day, while they were carefully monitoring me in Intensive Care, Scott had phoned my school to tell me about his exam result. The school secretary had heard about my accident, and was in tears when she told Scott what had happened.

I've learned that I was in a coma for many days. While I was lying there, my father and mother arrived with my husband Todd, as well as my little brother. And Scott. He had driven down all the way from college to be with me. He told my father that he blamed himself for my accident; that somehow it wouldn't have happened if I hadn't been driving down to help him every week.

My father told me later what he had said to Scott. My father is a Christian. So is my mother. I don't know where I went wrong, but I guess I must have.

"Scott, that's nonsense. Barbara was helping you because she wanted to. She cares about you a lot, you know. Ever since you were little. And God is looking after her ... you'll see!"

But it seemed like God wasn't paying attention. The coma lasted for eight days.

On the last day, Scott was in the room with my mother. She was reading something from the Bible, and Scott was holding my hand and praying. The doctor was looking at the instruments that were monitoring my health, or in my case, lack of it.

Suddenly there was a beeping noise. The doctor looked at the screen, and then turned to my mother.

“Mrs. Andrews, it looks like this might be the end. I think Barbara is slipping away. It probably would be best if you were to call the rest of the family in to say their goodbyes.”

My mother tells me that she just sat there. She couldn't move. But she was looking at Scott. She thinks she remembers him saying “Please, God, let her stay with us a little while longer.” And then he cried out with pain, as an electric shock seemed to travel down his arm. I went into convulsions. Apparently I was near death.

I'm not sure what's supposed to happen when you're in a coma. I've read that people in the room who are talking to each other, or to you, are supposed to be a positive thing. Somehow the comforting voices are supposed to get through to you. To help.

But I don't remember any of that. For eight days I was hanging by my fingertips to the side of a deep dark hole. It felt like a well ... I could make out a tiny circle of light way above me. Below me there was only more darkness.

I'd been hanging that way for so long that I knew I couldn't last much longer. My fingertips were raw and bleeding, and they were starting to lose their grip.

I felt myself starting to fall into the blackness.

And that's where something wonderful happened. A hand reached down from somewhere and grabbed my hand. And held on tight. I felt an electric shock course through my body.

And then that hand, that wonderfully strong hand, pulled me out of the hole!

My eyelids fluttered open. I was confused. But I looked at my hand, and there was Scott, holding on as tightly as he could. He was crying.

“Ohhh ... nasty headache! What??” I mumbled. I wasn't sure what was going on.

My mother bent over to kiss me. “She's awake!” The doctor looked mystified ... he didn't know what to make of it. But he checked me over, and pronounced me officially out of my coma.

By now the room was full. In addition to my mother, my father had come in, along with my brother and my husband Todd, who proceeded to kiss me though his tears. "Welcome back, honey" he told me. "I knew God wouldn't let us down!"

Did I mention that my husband was a Christian too? Everybody but me, it seems.

"What do you remember?" my father asked me.

"I was in a hole ... " I proceeded to tell them about what happened. "And then Scott ... Scott, are you here?"

Scott had moved to the back of the room so that my family could be close. Now he moved up to my bedside. "I'm here."

"Scott ... it was you! You pulled me out of the hole. Did you feel that shock too?"

"I felt it, Barbara."

"I wasn't really in a hole was I?"

So they told me all about the accident. I'm glad I don't remember.

But I knew something wonderful had happened to me here. I looked at Scott, and he knew too. So with the others listening in, we decided a few things there in that room.

We decided that God had acted through Scott to bring me back. Apparently He wasn't ready to take me yet. And we also decided that what had happened to us was too important to keep to ourselves ... we needed to share it with others. Maybe our story would restore someone's faith, or even bring someone new to God.

Did I mention that I became a Christian on that day? With everyone standing around, I prayed to God to ask Him to forgive my sins, and I asked Jesus to be my Saviour. Everyone cried a lot. And laughed.

Several weeks later I did indeed attend church with Scott and his family. And we sat in the front of the room with a microphone and told everyone the story of how God had helped Scott to bring me back.

And I almost forgot. Scott got 95% on his chemistry exam. He thinks he owes me for that. But I got the better deal.