

When the Stars Danced

Chapter One

In The Heart of a Child

*I'd rather write my name in the heart
of a child than any other place in the
world.*

Life is full of strange and wonderful surprises. After my first two books were published they were translated into fifteen languages and published around the world. It was very exciting to my children to know that other children in China, Japan and the farthest corners of the world were reading about our family and sharing our lives.

I was invited to speak at churches, conventions and to appear on television programs.

I don't like to be away from my family and I especially don't like to fly on airplanes. I know God can take care of me when I'm on the ground, but I have

trouble believing He can take care of me when I'm sitting in a metal tube, miles above the earth, hurtling through space at hundreds of miles an hour.

In spite of this fear, I felt God had given me a rare opportunity to share my faith and tell the story of our people. It was time to give something back to God and to all the people who had made a difference in my life.

My husband, Don, was able to arrange his work schedule so he could stay home with our children during the four or five days a month I was gone. I turned down most of the speaking engagements and book tours I was offered because I couldn't bear being away from my family. It was always difficult to choose which ones to accept.

The publisher's secretary, Sharon, called me about the latest tour they planned for me. "I have you scheduled for an important television interview on January twelfth." Sharon was almost squealing with delight. "It's in Chicago and you'll be on the most popular talk

show in the nation, millions of people will be watching! We'll not only sell thousands of books but this is only the beginning; we've already scheduled you to do twenty television interviews from California to New York!"

"I can't go anyplace on the twelfth," I said. "It's Snow Cloud's sixth birthday party: I have to be home for my son's birthday!"

"You can't be serious! You can't pass up this interview for a child's birthday party. Tell your son you'll celebrate a couple of days early. He's only six, he won't know the difference," Sharon said.

"A month from now no one will remember who was on television that day, but I'll never forget missing my son's birthday and neither will he," I explained. "Please try to schedule the interview for another date and tell them I have to bake a birthday cake shaped like a car that day."

Sharon was very unhappy when she hung up. She was even more unhappy when she called back an hour later. "I

called the television producer. He said they couldn't schedule their show around birthday parties and they will just replace you with another guest," she said in a tone of voice that was supposed to make me feel guilty. "You missed a very important opportunity and it could hurt your career."

"My family is my career," I said.

That was several years ago. Every time Snow Cloud's birthday arrives he smiles and asks, "Remember my sixth birthday when you turned down that big television show just to be at home with me?"

"You are worth it. I wouldn't miss your birthday to be with five kings and a president," I tell him.

"I know," he answers.

Although I appreciated all the good things my publisher had done for me and his work in promoting my books, we could not resolve our conflict about my traveling. He wanted me to be away from home three weeks of each month for personal appearances. I had

originally agreed to be away from home four or five days a month and even that had become too painful. My children were too young to travel with me. I had to make a choice.

I knew there would be those who felt I had let them down, that God had given me work to do and a story to tell and that I was not doing the work I'd been called to do. I also knew that if I refused to go on the tours to promote the books that I would be fired, my books would go out of print and it would be a financial disaster to our family who had just bought a beautiful ranch in the mountains.

I knew the cost was going to be great. But I knew the cost of being away from my family was even greater.

My publisher canceled my contract. My books were taken off the market. We put our home up for sale.

People often asked how I could give up the crowds and the attention and the television interviews to stay at home.

“It’s easy,” I would answer, “I’d rather be famous at home and unknown to the rest of the world than to be famous everywhere in the world and be a stranger at home.”

Less than a month later a new publisher contacted me about putting my books back into print: he said I would not have to travel unless I wanted to.

God had heard my prayers and made it possible for me to have the best of both worlds. My message would be heard but I could stay at home with my family. Of course, there were still a few surprises waiting for us.

My husband is usually a very calm, quiet man but sometimes even he can get pushed to the breaking point.

“Crying Wind, who was that?” Don gasped when a man wearing nothing but a robe walked through our kitchen and headed for the bathroom.

“I don’t know,” I said as I poured myself a cup of coffee, “but the rest of his family is setting up their camper in our front yard.”

“But WHO are they?” Don’s voice had become rather loud.

“Well, when I spoke to that Christian Bookseller’s Convention in Chicago last winter, I ended my speech by saying that if any of them were ever in Colorado to stop by for coffee. I think someone has come for their cup of coffee,” I explained.

“But there were six thousand people at that convention. Who are these people in our yard?” Don asked.

“The lady outside said I would remember her because she wore a blue dress and waved at me,” I answered.

“It’s going to be a long summer,” Don said as he swallowed two aspirin.

We lived fifty miles from the nearest town but that summer more than one hundred and fifty people “dropped in for coffee.” They took flowers from our garden, took endless photographs of our family, asked me to make moccasins for them and one family asked if we would let their grandmother live with us because they really couldn’t stand her

anymore. People borrowed tools, bedding and money and a lady from Iowa asked me to wash up a few things for them because their little Jimmy had been carsick. I fed them lunch while I washed their laundry.

People arrived at any time during the day or night and more than once arrived after we'd gone to bed. It's not easy for Don to be friendly after midnight.

A man escaped from a mental hospital in Maine after reading my book, *Crying Wind*. He believed voices told him we were meant to be man and wife and he hitchhiked all the way to Colorado to marry me. He arrived on my porch and when I explained to him I was already married and had children he went into a rage and I had to call the sheriff and have him taken away.

The man had spent twenty years in the mental institution and because his doctors considered him violent and dangerous and because he'd escaped, he was placed in an institution with tighter security. He'd been a serious threat not

only to us, but to everyone who'd given him a ride or come into contact with him while he traveled across the country. Other than frightening us, he hadn't harmed us. We became very nervous about visitors after that.

One newspaper interview mentioned that our family always attended a certain church every Sunday. When we returned home from church on one occasion, we found the house had been burglarized; the thief had even stolen the food out of the freezer. It bothered me that my home could no longer be the warm and welcoming place I'd dreamed about.

Don and I agreed we had to regain our privacy and never, under any circumstances, was I to invite six thousand people to drop in for coffee, no matter how nice they were.



The mail was always wonderful. Many people wrote to me after reading my

books; hundreds of letters came from children all around the world. I became a pen pal with many people, making friendships that lasted for years. I like letters because they don't wake me up at night, they don't ask me to do laundry and they don't get me into trouble. Well, most of the time they don't get me into trouble.

I received a frantic letter from Dorothy, a woman in her sixties, who told me she was a good, honest woman who never did anything crazy. However, when her ladies' book club reviewed my book, that snooty old Rachael Thurston bragged that she was going to write to *Crying Wind* and ask for her autograph. For some reason, something just snapped inside Dorothy and she said she was one of my closest friends.

Dorothy, who was always so quiet and shy, was suddenly the center of attention and she loved the look of envy on Rachael's face. Dorothy threw caution to the wind and went a step further to announce she was having lunch with me

on Friday. Her moment of glory backfired when everyone in the ladies' book club asked to come along to have lunch with us.

Her letter begged me to meet her at the restaurant on Friday and pretend we were old friends. She said she'd wear a pale pink dress with a string of pearls so I could recognize her. She'd understand if I didn't come because I must think she was insane and if I didn't show up, she'd admit to her club that she'd lied and she'd resign because that awful old Rachael would make her life miserable. She was terribly sorry for the whole mess.

I folded up her letter. There was only one thing to do.

Friday, I arrived at the restaurant, threw my arms around Dorothy's neck and raved on and on about how dear she was to me. We had a delightful luncheon, Dorothy was so grateful she didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Rachael was a very cold and unlikable

woman and I could understand why Dorothy had acted the way she had.

I guess we've all had a Rachael Thurston in our lives at one time or another. We all ate delicious turkey sandwiches except for Rachael who ate crow.

The best thing about that day was Dorothy and I became real friends and met often for lunch and a good visit. She always said that when I walked into the restaurant she felt like a troop of Mounties had arrived to rescue her.

Thanks, Dorothy; it isn't very often that I get to feel like a real hero.



It's strange how, just when you think you have your life all planned, something or someone will turn it upside down.

"Let's move," Don said.

I spent the next few weeks crying, pouting, sulking and whining. I loved

our home. I'd expected to spend the rest of my life here, not just a brief four years. I knew he was right. We were too isolated and as they grew older, it was going to be hard for the children to live so far away from other people. The winters in the mountains were long—we were often snowed in for a week at a time—and the summers were short. I'd never liked the bitter cold weather of the high mountains.

Don wanted to move to a warmer place, closer to civilization, someplace where we could have privacy and live a normal life again.

Don, who is sensible and cautious, opened a map of the United States and spread it out on the kitchen table. He closed his eyes and put his finger down. He opened his eyes and said, "I guess we are moving to Cow Skin, Missouri."

I've never fainted in my life but I came closer at that moment than at any other time.

Our beautiful mountain home was sold and was going to be turned into a church

retreat. It was renamed “Praise Mountain”, and as much as it hurt to say goodbye to our ranch we had called “Thundering Hills,” I was grateful for all the spiritual awakenings and soul mending that would take place here for weary Christians. I felt God had allowed our home to be chosen for this special purpose to make it easier for us to let it go.

Another two weeks of crying (me, not the children), found us settled on a farm located half way between Cow Skin and Possum Flats, Missouri. In other words, Don had dragged us all to the end of the world. One farmer told us we were so far in the hills that even God had to have two road maps and a compass to find us. We were doomed.