

New Roads for Blind Eyes

A True Story of God's Blessings in My Trials

by Cammie Corlas Quinn

Little did I know the life-changing trials I would face when I decided to seek the Lord with my whole heart. All I knew on that February day in 2003 was that I was tired of mediocre Christianity. I wanted to seek God as I had never sought Him before. As I began my new journey, I received unusual blessings along the way, though they appeared in places I never would've expected and in ways I never would've chosen.

The Trials

Six weeks after my decision, the bottom dropped out of my life. On April 8th my husband, Kevin, and I drove from our home in Illinois to the University of Iowa in Iowa City. For two years Dr. H. Culver Boldt in the Department of Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences had been monitoring a small tumor in my right eye. My local optometrist, Dr. Jeffrey Huettemann, had discovered it during a routine eye checkup. After Dr. Boldt studied my latest test results, he broke the news.

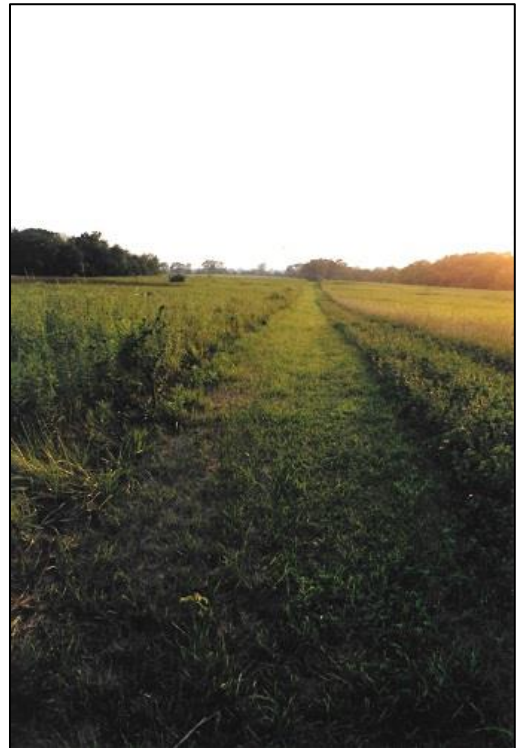
“There are changes in the tumor that concern me. It may be transforming into a malignant stage. We can re-examine it in three months, or we can treat it now with radiation or enucleation (eye removal).” He explained that both treatments would ruin the sight in that eye.

The decision seemed too drastic to make on the spot. I was the mother of two young children and an aspiring novelist. Take my eye out? I had *no* symptoms. It sounded like something in a horror movie. How could I make *that* decision? We opted to wait.

A few days later, a box from my prospective publisher arrived in the mail. Inside was the manuscript of the novel I'd poured my heart into for the last ten years. Rejected. Since childhood, I had dreamed of becoming a published novelist. I'd attended writer's conferences and worked my way up the ladder with a highly acclaimed publisher. Now, in the space of one week, I had lost my health and my dream.

The Prayers

Where was God? This was my cry as I walked in a field near our house. I'd made a practice of walking there alone at dusk to pray. Tonight, I challenged a moonlit sky, too light yet for stars.



“Where are you, Lord? Do you care about me? Where are you?”

Just then, a light appeared beneath the moon. As I watched, a large meteorite as exquisite as a solitaire diamond skimmed across the broad night canvas. I had seen meteorites before, but the size and timing of this one astounded me. It was as if God had drawn His finger across the heavens. God’s message to me was clear. *I’m here. Just trust Me.* From that moment on, I knew God was in control.

As my next appointment in Iowa drew near, I struggled with what to tell the doctor. Family and friends prayed. I practiced walking in the field late at night with my hand over one eye. I imagined Jesus walking beside me and felt quieted by His presence. I decided that the stars seemed slightly smaller with one eye, but they were still beautiful. I tucked a Bible verse in my jeans pocket each morning, one of which was 2nd Corinthians 5:7: “For we walk by faith, not by sight.”

One of God’s creatures, the red-tailed hawk, became precious to me. I began to think of hawks as God’s messengers assuring me of His presence. They appeared more and more often along our local highway, waiting like heaven-sent sentinels atop the telephone poles.



I yielded my writing entirely to the Lord. I realized that I had never asked God what *He* wanted me to write. Novels? Articles? Poems? For the first time, what mattered most was that I be allowed to glorify Him with the written word, no matter the form.

“My eye is yours,” I told God as I prayed in the field. “If I can see You better with one eye than with two, please take my eye.”

The Diagnosis

Then came my appointment. On July 8th, Kevin and I waited in Dr. Boldt’s office while five white coats consulted over the latest test results. I clutched Bible verses in my pocket.

Dr. Boldt looked up. “I’m more concerned than ever that this tumor is malignant. I recommend immediate treatment.”

Cancer crashed down. Instantly I felt an unusual sensation, as if a pitcher of warm milk had been poured over me. I was so surprised that I almost laughed. Later, I realized that prayer was insulating me from fear. My reply was as crystal clear as the doctor's diagnosis: "I want you to remove my eye."

Surgery was scheduled for ten days later. A whirlwind of pre-tests ensued. Doctors needed to know if the potential cancer had already spread.

As I lay under a CAT scan machine, the verse in my pocket ministered perfectly: "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust" (Psalm 91:4). One morning I awoke with a song inscribed on my soul: "He Giveth More Grace." In the last church service before my surgery, a visiting quartet, unaware of my predicament, sang "Be Thou My Vision." And always, always, the Lord dispatched His sentinels to the telephone poles along my path.

The Surgery

On July 17th, Kevin and I returned to Iowa City. The next morning as we approached the hospital doors, I paused to look up. It was the last time my right eye would see the sky. A few hours later when the surgical team swung open the double doors of my operating room, I clung to Isaiah 26:3. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee." I felt no fear as



the anesthesiologist injected medicine into my IV line. Dr. Keith Carter performed the surgery, saving my life. After one night in the hospital, I returned home. My only pain was a headache. I felt such peace that I forgot to call for the pathology report. Weeks later, I learned that the tumor was indeed malignant melanoma.

The Unfamiliar Paths

Six weeks after surgery, my father died unexpectedly. His funeral was on the same day I was scheduled to receive my prosthetic eye. I wrote his eulogy and read it in the church with my eye patch on. "A Father's Love" praised the love of my earthly father and the love of my Heavenly

Father. Because of the trial I had just passed through, the words of the eulogy became doubly poignant and powerful.

Soon after, a school principal asked me to teach a writing workshop. When I called a church-curriculum publisher to ask for sample materials for my students, I recognized the voice on the other end of the line. It belonged to an editor I'd met at a writing conference. I told her my eye story. She said, "Write it and send it." On the one-year anniversary of my surgery, my story was published in a take-home Sunday School paper. Thousands of copies were distributed to churches throughout the United States.

I began searching the Bible for verses about sight. I found an intriguing promise, wrote it on a business card, and carried it in my pocket: "I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them..." (Isaiah 42:16a). One morning at church, the director of a food pantry announced a need for volunteers. The pantry was in an impoverished area of the city. I knew this was the "unfamiliar path" meant for me. The clients who came for food were burdened with all manner of trials, including cancer. I gave them my eye story. A homeless man who had visited our pantry handed out copies of my story as he walked across the country. My perspective of "publishing" began to change.

The pastor of our large church discovered I was a writer after reading a thank-you card I sent the church for get-well flowers. Though I had never conversed with him on a personal level, one morning after church he asked me to develop a series of his sermons into a book about faith. He, too, had just passed through a health crisis. During the seven-year-long process of ghost-writing the book for him, my own faith deepened. In 2011, *That I May See Him* was published. It is still in print today.

The same pastor asked me to tell my eye story on a national TBN television program. A friend of his in broadcasting had offered him an hour-long slot. Years later, the optometrist who found my tumor gave me his spot on a local radio program to tell my story. The story has traveled across the sea to friends in England, France, and Russia. Just when I think the story has run its course, another unexpected door opens.

The Road Ahead

It has been almost twenty years since I lost my eye. During that time, God has led me along amazing, unfamiliar paths. Every year I hike in the Rocky Mountains. I've paraglided in Switzerland and parasailed in Hawaii. Everywhere I go, I take my eye story with me.



I'm busy now writing a new novel, but my expectations for it are much broader than the typical, earthly perception of success. No ordinary New York Times bestseller list could ever compete with God's ongoing, custom-made itinerary for my writing journey. The night in 2003 that God answered my desperate cry with a meteor that heralded "Just trust me," I never would've imagined that He would interweave my writing dreams with eye cancer. The joy in knowing that He orchestrated it all is priceless.

Walking on God's chosen pathways has grown within me a spiritual lens that I didn't have before I lost my eye. Instead of seeking good circumstances to make myself happy, I focus on off-the-beaten-path opportunities to share my stories of God's love. My journey has been a long lesson in learning to die, then to reawaken to the realization that Jesus and His plot for my life are enough. In an ironic twist that I never expected, He has become the real writer, and I have become one of His publishers.

Though my cancer could return someday, I wouldn't trade what has happened to me for anything. If I were given the option to receive my eye back, I would say "no" if it meant returning all the gifts that came with losing it. One eye is such a small price to pay to experience the creativity of God's love. There is nothing to fear once you know that love. Not even death. I will forever be grateful for the sight God gave me the day that He took my eye.