Will's Story

My mother was Catholic, and my father was a self-confessed agnostic. He had to sign a form to agree to raise his children Catholic when he married my mother in St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church. So I was raised Catholic. My mother had a strong belief in God and would pray the Our Father every night at the foot of my bed. When she could not, she would have my father come in and do this with us. She sent me to Catholic school from the second until the eighth grade, with only small breaks in first grade and third grade in public schools when they divorced. I was an altar boy in the sixth grade when the Mass was still in Latin. At one time I thought I wanted to be a priest. My parents divorced when I was 9 and I lived with my mother until the eighth grade when my dad got custody of my brothers and I by court decision. I was confirmed and finished out my eight grade year at St. Martin of Tours Catholic school. Confirmation is a Catholic ritual which we prepared for by studying the Catechism. We had to give our testimony that we agreed with the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, or we could not be confirmed. This was a requirement for confirmation.

When I was in the third grade, a student asked why we had to cover a certain book every year since we never used it. The book was the Bible. The very next day the nun said to get the book out, and we started reading in Genesis. I always remember that when I put that book away back in my desk, I felt a peace that I didn't feel when I put my Math book away. And I liked Math!

We continued reading every day until about Exodus, chapter 32, where Moses came down the mountain with the two stone tables with the ten commandments written on them. When he saw the Israelites dancing around the golden calf, he threw the two stone tablets to the ground, breaking them to pieces. We stopped reading soon after this, and never read the Bible again from the fourth through the seventh grades. In the eight grade, in preparing for Confirmation, the nun gave us a New Testament, and we read snippets where Jesus instituted the seven sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church.

During my years in Catholic school, I remember going to Mass every day at times in the morning before school. This was during the second Vatican Council in the early 1960s. I remember looking in the Bible that was in the pews and searching for a reference to priests. I just got it in my head one day to look for where it talked about priests. I just wondered when and how God set up the priesthood as it was in the Roman Catholic Church. The Bible then was the Douay-Rheims Bible, for I remember happening upon 1 Timothy 4:17, which reads, "Neglect not the grace that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with imposition of the hands of the priesthood."

As I kept reading another time I also remember encountering 1 Timothy 5:19, which says, "Let the priests that rule well be esteemed worthy of double honour: especially they who labour in the word and doctrine."

And also Titus 1:5, which says, "For this cause I left thee in Crete: that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting and shouldest ordain priests in every city, as I also appointed thee:"

At that time, as I read these scriptures, my heart was set at rest. The priests were set up by God to be His ministers in Church, just as the Bible said. This of course was before Vatican II had ended in 1965. After Vatican II had ended, I remember going to Mass and looking for a Bible again, but they were not there. Some time later, a new version was inserted in the pews. As I read the new version, I wondered if the parts about priests had changed. Sure enough, the new version did not have the word priest anywhere in 1 Timothy. This caused a huge question in my mind which was not answered until much later. I stored this in my heart, and trusted that God would show me the truth in due time. And I kept going to Mass as I had been taught.

After I graduated from Catholic school, since I had moved in with my Dad, at his suggestion, I went to a public high school, Venice High, and graduated in 1971. I then went to UCLA. I was a practicing Catholic all during this time and went to Mass faithfully every week. My dad would take us until we were old enough to take ourselves.

I joined Phi Kappa Psi fraternity in my sophomore year at UCLA, and still continued to go to Mass on Sundays. In my junior year I met a girl at a sorority, and invited her to a Beer bust at the fraternity. She came, and we soon became intimate. She said she was a Christian, and among her books was a Bible, which I opened one day. I don't remember what I read, but from that moment, I knew I had to know the truth. God had felt distant. In a way, I felt like I had been pretending. Just performing the ritual of going to Mass every Sunday was not enough any more. I began to say to God, "if you are there, I need to hear from you in a way that I know you are real without a shadow of a doubt." I reasoned that God, being God, was big enough that He could get in touch with me in a way that I could know that He was real. I shouldn't have to pretend.

There was a man who was a checker at the Lucky's Supermarket where I had worked as a box boy, and then as a stock clerk and checker. He was always asking people if they knew Jesus. He would greet people in the check stand with a smile and a handshake, even if he didn't know them. He would greet his fellow workers in the milk box while we stocked the milk, and tell us about Jesus. He would regularly take people to coffee after work. I decided to ask him if we could go get coffee after work and talk. I wanted to rule him out right away. I thought he was a little weird. But he had a big smile. I wondered if it was real.

We soon met for coffee after work. I remember I sipped mine for about a half hour, waiting for him to give me his spiel. I thought he would try to convert me, and then I would have the evidence I needed to rule him out and keep going. I finally asked him, "Aren't you going to give me your spiel?" He replied, "I don't have a spiel. You talk..." I really didn't know what to say at that point. I was unprepared for his response. Things had not gone the way I thought they would. I then talked some about my life and he listened. That impressed me. I had grown up in an alcoholic home. When I was six years old, I came home from school one day, and a maid was in the kitchen. When I asked her where my mother was, she said she did not know. I soon found out when my Dad came home from work that she was in a "rest home". My mother would go on rampages for days at a time since my earliest memory, yelling and screaming at my Dad. I did not know what normal was. At any moment, fighting could erupt between them, and last for several days. This man, Gary, was someone I could talk to, and he listened.

Gary invited me to his church. I went, but was not impressed. It was very informal. They met in a recreation room in an apartment complex, not at all what I was used to going to Mass every Sunday. After it was over, we went to Gary's home, and I met his wife and child. He gave me a Parallel New Testament, which had just come out at that time, as a gift, and told me to read it. That was all he said.

I took that New Testament home to the frat where I was staying, and started to read. As I read, I wondered if I would feel anything like I did back in the third grade. There were four columns, two on each page. I diligently compared each column for any sign of corruption or disagreement between the texts. Gary didn't think I would trust a Protestant Bible. He was right I guess. But as I read, each column more or less said the same thing. I wanted to know what the message was. What was it about? I thought the only important parts were the parts where Jesus had instituted the seven sacraments. I decided the King James was the most straight forward, even though the presence of Old English made it difficult to read. The other versions were too wordy, and I could tell they were adding words that were not in a literal translation of the text.

As I finished reading for a day, I checked my feelings, and I realized there was something there. A peace of some sort was definitely happening. I could not pin it down to any one thing, but it was definitely there. I soon finished the Gospels, and I realized that Jesus was a really good guy, but how could I know that it was all true? After i read through the book of Acts, I began to read the Epistles. As I read, I realized that I did not understand a single thing I was reading. I would read the same passage over and over, and it didn't make any sense. It was as if there was a mental block on my mind, and I could not put it together. As I kept reading, I realized I was hearing things, even though I did not understand what I was reading. And every time I read there was still a peace, so I decided to just keep reading, and see where it went. As I continue to read, I could tell that the peace was growing inside me.

I finally read through to Romans 10:9-11, which reads, "9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. 10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed..." Somehow, this spoke to me in very clear terms. This was the message that I had been seeking to know. This was what it was all about. Here it was in such simple terms, and yet I had struggled to understand it. I now knew I believed in Jesus. I did not know about anything else.

My friend Gary seemed to know I was ready, and he asked if he could pray for me in the Lucky's parking lot after work. I said yes. As he prayed over me, I felt as if heaven itself had poured into me. I did not know anything, but that Jesus was real, and that I could feel His presence. This changed my life from that point on. I wondered if anyone else had had this experience. I looked at people differently. I wanted to check my perception with others.

I knew immediately that I had to check in with my girlfriend. She said that she had accepted Christ already at a camp. I then knew our relationship had to change. We could no longer be intimate the way we had been for the past several months. I began to ask the Lord if she were the one. As I was walking to my car to go to work soon after, I felt a joy and a peace that lasted through my work shift. I again felt as if heaven were being poured out on me. I believe the Lord was saying to marry her. Soon after this I asked her to marry me. This was sometime in May, 1973. She said yes, and we were married several months later the next year, on July 20th, 1974. This length of time in our engagement was in purity, and was a confirmation to me that we should wed.

During my time at UCLA, I met Daniel Brown through my then fiancé and went to his Bible studies. We even had other Bible studies at the frat where it turned out there were some members who were Christians. God was on the move. I remember walking on campus and looking at students and wondering if they had this relationship with Jesus which I had encountered. I remember there was a girl that i often passed going from building to building to classes. She would always have a smile on her face. I wondered if she was a Christian. One day she walked straight up to me and said, "You're a Christian, aren't you!" This was not a question but a statement of fact. I said, "Yes, and you are too, aren't you!", echoing her tone of voice. We introduced ourselves, and she then said, "You have to meet my friend, Julianne". Every time I would meet Jeannette, she was say, "You have to meet my friend, Julianne". One day, she said she had set up a meeting between us on the Schoenberg quad, in front of the music building, at 10 AM. I said ok, on Jeannette met me at our appointed meeting place and took me to meet Julianne. After a short introduction, Jeannette then said, "Ok, Julianne is going to pray for you now". As I sat down on the Schoenberg quad, Julianne closed her eyes and prayed. When she opened her eyes shortly afterwards, she simply said, "Deliverance." We were done, and Jeannette walked me to my next class. As we were walking, I asked my new friend what deliverance was. She said she wasn't sure, but that it probably meant that I was going to deliver God's people, like David. But, she said, "God works miracles at Julianne's Bible studies. You should come." Up to this time, no one had said anything about miracles in my walk with Jesus. I was up for seeing a miracle if it were possible.

I had been reading the Bible, and trying to understand everything I read. I did not want to leave one stone, or one page, or one question, unanswered. There was one thing I could not put together on my own. Some Christians I had heard about were speaking in tongues. Try as i might, I could not understand what was written about tongues, or the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. And 1 Corinthians, chapter 12, was a complete mystery to me. I could not find anyone who could give me a clear understanding of tongues. When the time for Julianne's Bible study came, I made sure my fiancé was with me because I did not want her getting too far behind. We went and met Jeannette there. There were about six to eight people in a small apartment. I remember picking up Julianne's Bible and many of the pages were underlined if not all of them. This was something many of the Christians did back then, and I had done this as well. But I had never seen anyone underline so much of their Bible before.

Julianne prayed and then taught on the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. She started in Matthew 3:11 with the promise of John the Baptist who said, "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance. but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:" From there Julianne proceeded through seemingly the entire New Testament and every place where either the Baptism of the Holy Spirit was mentioned, or tongues was mentioned. Her explanation completely satisfied me, and when she asked if I wanted to receive the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, I went for it. She and the others laid hands on me, and she said, "Listen to the Lord." I was to hear this quite often from Julianne for many Bible studies after this. I listened and I thought I heard two words. When I told her I thought I heard two words, she said, "That's it. Go home". I was nonplussed. We left and I wondered how that could be it. It seemed to me that whenever tongues occurred, it just flowed like a river. I questioned the Lord as I drove my fiancé home. Along the way, I felt the Lord showed me that when I got home to the frat, I was to speak those two words out, and the rest would follow. So when I got to my room in the frat, I did just that. And out came the rest. I have spoken in tongues every since. My fiancé later told me she had spoken in tongues in the shower afterwards.

We were married the next year on July 20th, 1974. We had continued to go to Julianne's Bible studies, and would continue even after graduation. Julianne taught from booklets that a man named Dr. Grimes had written. We would soon hear Dr. Grimes for ourselves at seminars he would hold from time to time. He would drive down from Visalia and hold seminars which were well attended by about sixty to seventy people, sometimes more, sometimes less.

After we were married, we lived in married student housing at UCLA, and continued our studies. Julianne was going to Church on the Way in the San Fernando Valley and we followed her there. After a while Julianne decided to start having a Bible study at Jans Steps, near to Bruin walk on the UCLA campus. It was on a little plateau by the steps. Since we met on Sunday, we called it the Church at Jans Steps. Soon a guy named Mark started coming to our Bible studies. Mark soon was on fire for God, and he went to the head of the class so to speak. At one of the seminars, Mark proposed to Julianne and they were married soon afterwards.

One of the hallmarks of Julianne's Bible studies was the spiritual gift of prophecy. Julianne used Dr. Grimes book on Spiritual Gifts to teach us how to prophesy. I remember I wanted to do this but was a little timid. I was not sure how this worked, even after begin taught. I believed in the gifts, but I was not sure how they operated.

I remember, after my marriage to Janet, that I looked forward to the future. During this time, I remember asking God to tell me something impossibly far in the future, like He did with Abraham. I reasoned that God was God and knew the future. Nothing was too hard for Him. Everywhere we would go, I would ask, and wait for some thought to come from HIm. I seemed to make up things at times, and then check with Him and He seemed silent. This went on for several months, and I finally gave up and told God, "It's ok. You don't have to tell me anything impossibly far in the future. I will follow You anyway."

Then one day, Dr. Grimes had a seminar, and I prophesied for the first time. I don't remember what the prophesy was, but was probably something like, "My children, I love you." We were taught that God spoke in the first person, but He never gave new revelation as an addition to Scripture. All prophecy was to be judged by the written word of God. This made knowing God's word imperative, for we could not prophesy something that disagreed with His written word. This I was glad to do and pledged my life to study the word of God. I remember looking at my Bible and thinking, "I could do no better than to give my life to studying this book".

When the seminar broke for lunch, we all decided on a restaurant, and I remember that my wife drove us there. As we pulled into the parking lot at the back of the restaurant, I remembered seeing my friends who had arrived before us go up the stairs to the restaurant. As I got out of the car, I remember hearing a voice say, "She will betray you in fourteen years." These were the exact words I heard. I turned to look for my friends, but they had just gone into the restaurant. I then turned more and saw my wife. She was the only one in my vision. I was stunned. I could not believe I even had such a thought. As we walked into the restaurant I could not think of anything else. It seemed an eternity before we finished lunch. I kept asking the Lord, "Was that You? Was that You?" The Lord was silent.

As we left the restaurant I kept praying to the Lord, hoping that He would tell me that it was for someone else. Instead, He said, "Ok, it will be eighteen years". I was relieved. I thought to myself, "I will enjoy the time that I have. I am probably making this up anyway, like at other times." Still, I could not shake the feeling inside me. As Mary, who kept the prophecies about Jesus, and even Jesus' own words to her, in her heart as recorded in Luke 2:51, so I kept this in my heart for many years.

I graduated in 1975 with a degree in History. I had entered as a pre-engineering major, intending to switch to computer science which was a brand new major at the time. In my first physics class, required for a computer science major at the time, the professor called me into his office and said that he would give me a C if a got out of physics. Being a freshman, i said ok. I was still not sure so I took a computer class. The class was in PL1 which was supposed to be Fortran and COBOL combined into one language. The class had about 600 students being an entry level class. My TA was Chinese and would give one word responses to my questions if he had time for me. We had to key-punch cards to enter our program into the reader which would go through a wall by conveyor to the computer which filled a whole room on the other side. The computer was up 50% of the time and down 50% of the time. A sign out front posted the status. The professor, when giving the final, told us that if we got a C- on the final, we should get out of computer science. I got the grade and changed my major to History.

My first job after graduation was as an administrative assistant to the General Manager of State Mortgage Services. I got the job through a friend of a friend. This lasted about two years until my wife got pregnant. I then needed benefits which I did not have at State Mortgage Services. I then went to work as a stock clerk for Vons to get health benefits, working from 2:30 AM to 12 Noon, six days a week. This paid the bills but was very difficult on our marriage. After my daughter was born, I was able to get on swing shift from 1:30 to 10:30, five days a week. This was better, but still difficult since my wife worked as a Physical Therapy Assistant and got home at 2 or 3 PM daily.

My daughter was born in June of 1978 when my wife asked if we could have children. My son was born three years later in May, 1981, when my wife asked if we could have another child. They were beautiful in every way to me. But working swing shift was difficult with a family. I was never home it seemed. When we lunched at Bob's Big Boy with some friends from our Bible Study days at UCLA, Rock threw out a question, "If you could do anything you wanted to do, what would you do?" I remember I took that home and began asking myself what would I do. I decided to go back to school and take another computer class since two of my friends, Ben and Mark, were already in computer programmer jobs. I got an A in the class and continued taking classes for three years.

In 1985, I remember seeing a job offer on the wall in the break room at the Vons market I was working in at the time. It was for a warehouse clerk position. Our Bible study leaders at UCLA, now Mark and Julianne Maki, came for a visit to our home in Granada Hills at the time. They saw we were in trouble, and invited us to come and move out to Walnut where they had bought a house. Taking the job in the warehouse would not get me better hours, but it would be close to Walnut. I decided to take the position.

Working in the warehouse, as it turned out, was close to the computer room, and was a step away from getting into computers. I finally got into the trainee program at Vons in 1986. My hours finally changed to 8 AM to 5 PM, but this did not seem to help our marriage. In fact, things got worse.

After graduation from UCLA, our Bible study eventually broke up and everyone went their separate ways. We had moved to the San Fernando Valley and went to different churches, trying to find one that fit. We went to Foursquare, then Assembly of God, and finally to several Vineyards. My wife stopped going with me after a time. This seemed to be a turning point for us. After we moved to Walnut, I followed Mark and Julianne to the Vineyard in Anaheim. My wife went a few times and then stopped altogether. I never really knew what the issue was for her. However, a few months later, she became ill and sought the advice of doctors. She seemingly could not shake her cough. She finally was tested for allergies, and it was confirmed that she was allergic to almost everything. She soon developed asthma, and needed to use a breathing machine regularly.

It was during this time that she decided we also needed to get marriage counseling. During one of our sessions, she had an asthma attack, and I had to rush her to the hospital where she stayed the night in the ER. When the nurse came out, I asked her on a scale of one to ten what she would rate her. She replied that she was a 10!

She recovered but still had to take medication for her asthma and use her breathing machine. She was never the same after that, and still insisted that we needed marriage counseling. She finally started counseling on her own, and then advised me she was thinking about divorce. We had to move to an area where the air quality was better, she would tell me. We would look at the newspaper air quality report in the L.A. Times, and the air quality was consistently bad at that time. But the air quality in Vista, a half hour from San Diego was consistently better. She finally made up her mind we should move to Vista.

This meant I had to find a job close to Vista. I began a job search but didn't find anything. We bought a house in Vista with a down payment from her parents. She got a job as a physical therapy assistant right away in Vista and she stayed with a friend of my Dad's, a former secretary, and a Christian she said. This particular friend had recently divorced her husband.

We finally moved in and I commuted to work in Arcadia from my Dad's house in Fullerton, and went home on the weekends. This of course was not easy on our marriage. I began to feel a sadness the lasted for several months. I could not find a job near Vista. Finally, one night, she told me she wanted a divorce and wanted me to leave the house right away. I told her I would leave in the morning. In the morning she literally kicked me out of bed and I left. My son was about 10, and my daughter was about 13. I did not have time to say goodbye to them.

The divorce was final in 1992, one week after eighteen years of marriage. My wife was implacable, and would not change her mind. I continued going to the Vineyard in Anaheim where Mark went on staff as a pastor after getting his master's from Fuller Seminary. Julianne, as a marriage and family therapist, started a recovery group at the church, which I attended as well. This helped me process my feelings in a time of great despair. I felt as if I had lost everything. I saw my son only every other weekend. My daughter rarely came on these visits.

In 1995, I was laid off by Vons, who outsourced to Systems House Limited, and I went to work for the Orange County Register. I wrote over 100 programs for the Orange County Register, but they fired me in 1997, and I was out of work for two years. I finally was rehired by Vons/Safeway in 1999, and began working in Arcadia once again. And in the year 2000, Mark and Julianne Maki did a church plant, and started the Walnut Valley Vineyard Church in Walnut. I attended those first meetings in the park, and helped in whatever way I could. Mark once pointed to Dan, our worship leader, and said that he had a heart for worship. I took that home and wondered to myself if I had that. I started practicing my guitar and making lead sheets for worship. I soon had put a set together. As it happened, the worship leader at Celebrate Recovery at Fullerton EV Free, where I was attending with others from our Church in Walnut, needed someone to play guitar. I accompanied Michelle for as long as she was able to keep coming. For personal reasons, she had to drop out and I took over. Attendance was anywhere from 60 to 150 on a Friday night. I learned to lead worship here under Jay Williams, the pastor.

We had potlucks after church in Walnut, and soon moved to building 12 at Mt. San Antonio College, and then to a building on Carrey Road in Walnut. I did the tape ministry and soon started helping on the worship team. My job at Vons/Safeway lasted until December, 2003, when Vons/Safeway outsourced to the Philippines, and I was laid off once again. It was at this time I started teaching guitar for free in our Church building. We have since done many guitar recitals and talent shows for the class.

I was then hired in May of 2004 by Smart and Final, where I am currently a senior systems analyst. In 2004 I met Kathleen Pringle, who also worked at Smart and Final in the stores as a clerk, and then a store manager. She had moved to corporate In 2004 when we met, and in 2005, we started to take walks together on our breaks. I was not expecting to remarry and neither was she, though I think the thought had crossed our minds from time to time. I met her daughter, Tyler Anne, when she came to work one day in 2005. I remember I showed her something on the computer. That was the last I ever remember showing her anything on a computer. She has since become my technical expert on cell phones and iPads.

Kathleen began to come to the Walnut Valley Vineyard from her home in Long Beach and soon she and Tyler Anne moved to Walnut. She had gone through a divorce herself several years ago. Her son Andrew who was older moved in with some friends. Kathie would come over and make dinner, and then leave by 9 PM. As time went on, she began to leave me hints about marriage. We went on a ministry trip with other members of our church to New Orleans after hurricane Katrina, and it seemed our paths were merging. But I still could not let go of my former marriage, even though Janet had refused to reconcile or even be friends. I clung to a hope that she would return to our relationship.

At a men's retreat in 2009, a man came up to me and said that the Lord had told him to bring a book up to the retreat. He then said that the Lord had told him to give the book to me. The book was entitled How to Forgive...When You Don't Feel Like it, by June Hunt. I took the book from John Kerr, and thanked him. When I got home I read the book. I had forgiven Janet but had not let her go. The book helped me to let go.

Mark, our pastor, facilitated our premarital class, which went very smoothly. We realized there was no reason why we should not be married. I finally asked her to be my wife at my kitchen table, and she said yes by text message after thinking about it while driving her daughter home that same evening. Mark officiated our marriage vows in a friend's backyard three weeks later. We decided that after five years of waiting, we had waited long enough. We were married May 23, 2010.

The Walnut Valley Vineyard closed in 2012 after seemingly being pulled apart at the seems. It seemed God's will that we should move on. Mark and Julianne started another church plant in Brea called The Journey. Kathie and I soon found a church a block from our house called On a Mission Church with pastor Carlos Robles. Will is on the worship team and Kathie serves on the women's teams for the potlucks after service on Sunday. We have found real relationship here, and feel we have found a place where we can help others grow, and not just receive and be blessed ourselves.