

DOES IT STILL EXIST?

by Terri Brown

Where was it, it had to be here, certainly the newspaper would have it, right? I hunted the front page, the home and family section, even the cartoons but I couldn't find it, where was it? I saw stories of death, fire, corruption and terror but it wasn't there. Ok, so I'll look on the internet and google it, that's where it would be, but again, all I found was hurt in every story I saw. How could it be that everywhere I looked all I saw was the horrors of the world? I guess the old saying that bad news sells newspapers was true. I was sad to think that maybe it no longer existed

Recently, I attended a meeting and as I was waiting for the other attendees to arrive someone came in crying. I asked what the matter was, they said that there was so much hate and cruelty going on in the world that they just felt sad. Ugh, this wasn't a good sign for my search either. This made me even more determined to find it, I would conquer this search. I thought I'd look it up in the dictionary, see how it was defined. The definition read "to cherish a desire with anticipation: to want something to happen or be true". Hmm, I can't say that really helped but it was a starting point.

So, I dug deeper and deeper in order to search for it but perhaps it truly did no longer exist. However, it has always been here. Mary had it when the angel appeared to her and said "Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus." The announcement of the birth of Jesus brought it to everyone who believed he was their Lord and savior. Ahhh, now I was starting to see it, here in this Bible story.

Ok, I'm going to intensify my search more, I KNOW I can find it now. I did a little more digging and searching and all of a sudden, I was starting to get a little glimmer of it in stories I read. I saw a story about the devastating wildfires of California and here I found some signs of it, headlines read "Despite overwhelming loss in the Northern California wildfires, people are still putting out messages and symbols of HOPE." Someone had put up an American flag and a sign to thank the firefighters.

Even though these people no longer had a home or any belongings, they were still thanking the firefighters who fought that long hard battle. There it is, I may have found it!!!! I read stories of fires that devastated everything in its path but there were still glimmers of HOPE as new growth sprang up among the ashes.

I read of a young man by the name of Joseph, who at the age of 13 lost everything and his life changed forever. He later wrote that the years that followed would become his worst nightmare; he almost dropped out of high school, he was destitute at the age of 17, slept in a church for months, begged or stole food, and lived in a slum for 3 years. However, this man picked himself up and found his way through the scorn that was thrown upon him.

He remained resolute in his hope, he refused to give up and his life changed. He graduated with First Class honors with a degree in Computer Science, received the best graduating student award by the British Computer Society, has published two books, is a public speaker and coaches young leaders. There, there it was!!! I found it again. This man never lost it and never gave up, he had HOPE, without it, what would have happened to him?

Would he have just given up and never accomplished all he did? He never gave up even though everyone around him kept trying to push him down. I was seeing signs of it and it appeared there were lots of them. Ah, I was starting to feel much better now. I was going to search more, I knew there was more of it out there.

When I intensified my search I found a Bible verse that really stuck out to me; have Hope in God Because He has Good Plans for You. In Jeremiah Chapter 29 Verse 11 it says "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." In this verse, for me, the word prosper does not mean wealth in the form of money but something much greater, God holds the key to my prosperity and has since the day I was born.

I hold on to that hope that each and every day I will prosper to make this world a better tomorrow, even if it comes in the form of one small kind act of kindness. What we don't always know is that one small act of kindness can change a persons' life forever, give them hope to go on and for a bright tomorrow.

Each and every day there are signs of Hope all around us. For me they come in many forms; the birth of a child, the changing of winter into Spring as God's creations come back to life, seeing the rising of the sun each morning, a loved one

being healed from a sickness, these are just a few signs of Hope that I can relate to.

I recently came across this story from a few years ago about a woman's life changing journey. She writes: It was a sunny day in July when the phone rang at work, it was the call she had been waiting for. The doctor on the other end said "I'm sorry to tell you but you have cancer". Those were the last words she heard as her mind raced thinking how she would tell her family, how would they react and what could she do to let them know she'd be ok and not give up Hope that she would make it.

She was finally snapped back into reality when the voice on the other end said "Are you ok"? She felt like asking if they were an idiot but thought better of it. She did hear something after that about someone calling her in the afternoon to set-up appointments for something.

As she raced home from work to tell her family, she only hoped she'd get there first before she received the follow-up calls, setting up hundreds of appointments. As she turned into the driveway and walked in the backdoor, her family looked at her and said "what are you doing home?" She answered with those 3 words she never thought she would be telling her family "I have cancer". While they were still trying to digest the news, she quickly added, "I'll be fine, I'm going to beat it".

The day of her surgery came all too quickly but she knew she needed to face this challenge in order to "beat the dragon". She hoped and prayed for a good end result.

After she was checked in and was donning the fashionable hospital johnnie and robe, she felt like she had so much to tell her family but everyone sat there in what seemed like dead silence as they waited for her turn to come. Finally, they came to get her but not before she kissed each one on the cheek, told them how much she loved them and not to give up hope, she would be just fine.

After her surgery came the next step, the dreaded chemotherapy. The days that followed would prove to be some of the hardest she would ever experience but she never gave up hope that she would have a bright future. She always trusted in the Lord that he would keep her safe and get her through this.

With the completion of her chemo treatments, she writes it was onto radiation; however, God wasn't done testing her Hope and Faith just yet. As she neared the

end of her radiation, her father's health took a turn for the worst and on a sunny day in January, he passed away peacefully.

As the weeks passed following her father's death and her treatments, she found an inner strength she didn't know existed in her, which was put to the test at her final oncologist appointment when her doctor turned to her, looked her square in the eyes and said "you weren't supposed to make it". She will never forget those final words he spoke to her; however, God had watched over, kept her safe, as he had plans for her.

That woman now stands before you 14 years past this life changing experience to tell you, never once through those many months of pain and suffering did I ever give up on hope or faith, it brought me through some of the darkest days I have ever experienced.

After all of the searching, researching and reading I did on HOPE, I found in the end it lives in ALL of us. While it means something different to each one of us, it is still alive and going strong in the world around us. God has plans for us; each and every day our hope is renewed in this glorious world God has created for us. **Amen**