

Swallow's Nest

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Foreword

The pages of my King James Bible in Psalms are tattered. Psalm 84 is no exception. This psalm has given me encouragement over and over, especially on darker days. The speaker is passionate, literally crying out for God. In verse 3, the speaker finds hope and comfort through the metaphor of a swallow's nest, which in turn is a metaphor for God's altar. Is a poem we write not a nest or an altar? In a poem we bring our lives to Jesus. We express our thoughts, our dreams, our conflicts—the details of our lives. We take refuge there. We reach out to others there. The poem shelters us, becomes a secret nest, and if we lay our “young”—indeed, our lives—on His altars, it can become a source of strength, and peace.

Mary McIntosh, co-editor, *Swallow's Nest*

Psalm 84:1–3 (KJV)

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O
LORD of hosts!

My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth
for the courts of the LORD: my heart
and my flesh crieth out for the living
God.

Yea, the sparrow hath found an
house, and the swallow a nest for
herself, where she may lay her young,
even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my
King, and my God.

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Evolution

By Dorothy Doede

I laughed when I read
that “Evolution” designed unique features in life forms,
that “Evolution” selected adaptive traits for survival.

I laughed when I read that,
but it was tragic.

They thought they deleted a creator
from their empirical explanation of
how and
what and
where and
when and
why

But they did not.

They raised a god in their own image
and named it “Evolution”
A new religion reverencing Science
complete with dogma and doctrine
sacred texts and prophets
faith and ritual
offering salvation through knowledge and
education
looking to the hope of technology

I wonder what will happen when they find out
that man’s science studies @Elöhím’s art?



Sister

By JoAnne Bowles

Sometimes I stare at our faces
in the photo from when I was four
and she was new and tiny in my arms—
my big toothy grin, her squinting eyes—
and I remember vividly
the time I insisted on holding her
despite our dinner guests
because I knew how and anyway
she was *my* sister

Last year when she finally inherited
my old room, she clambered over my stuff
with her own, taking weeks to move
from one room to the next
as if she wanted to mix all our junk,
until it was like two colors of play dough
that would never be the same
no matter how long our fingers pried
at little bits of recognizable shades,
trying to salvage pieces we did not mean to share

Just a month ago I found one of her CDs
among my own. I listened to it over and over
and it was like she was there in my apartment,
like I could hear her harmonizing with each song
because I knew just how she would sound



Vocabulary

By JoAnne Bowles

He towered over her,
held the purple hood of her jacket
in his hand so she wouldn't wander
in the parking lot
by the natural foods store

I watched the tiny one
crouch down to stare
at the metal circle with holes in it,
her eyes growing wide

“That’s a drain,” the man said
in a small voice
that took away his years
and pain until he was just
a man squatting in a parking lot
with a very important person

Family Shopping Day

By JoAnne Bowles

On a Saturday morning in July
with breakfast-on-the-go, we follow the map
Dad spent half an hour carefully constructing the night before
showing the best possible route to every sale on the northeast side of town,
to look for lost treasures in other people's
boxes of children's books,
tables of dishes, leaning towers of CDs,
and always clothes, clothes, clothes.
There was the time I found a whole set of Corel dishes
and then there was the time I found that cushy green chair
that has become my favorite,
and rejects from Oprah's book club,
acquired for 25 cents apiece, fill half of my shelf space.
Sometimes Mom sees a pair of baby shoes,
she just can't leave behind
or some size 2T Oshkosh overalls that are just "so precious,"
"for the grandkids someday."
My sister takes every magazine she sees,
even the *Trailer and RV*, exclaiming,
"They gave me the whole box for only a dollar!"
so she can cut them up to make collages later.
Dad always buys the coffee whenever it is offered,
along with the fifty-cent mug it comes in.
My youngest sister always digs for the little things,
a tweety bird key chain, a bottle of glittery nail polish, some silly putty,
an etch-a-sketch that still works.
My little brother loves to hunt for Sega games,
and perhaps a pair of Nike tennis shoes if he's lucky,
because he would never be seen in an imitation brand.
The day is not over until after we've picked up a couple
two-for-a-dollar corn dogs at the 7-11 for a late lunch
and then stopped by a few more sales
to get the best bargains ever
because we know that by 4:00 the sellers are becoming
so afraid of the possibility of having to carry
all of their junk back into their homes,
that they will practically give it away.
We know this because once when we had our own yard sale
my parents eased their anxiety at 4:30
by declaring a paper bag special,
"All you can fit in a paper bag, just five dollars!"
and it was amazing how much junk disappeared in half an hour—
cut-up magazines, stiff silly putty,
old nail polish, and Mt. Rainier mugs

Redwoods

By Julie Kepler

Stately, straight sentinels,
God's arboreal guardians—
tallest among trees.

As we gaze up,
these ancient silent giants
reflect our awe.

Deflecting amazement
from themselves,
they redirect us upward,
up,
pointing up
to where God dwells
until our proper worship swells.



Pluck

By Julie Kepler

Little Kestrel
on the road sign
perched
where the hawk
on most days waits,
ready to launch
and pounce
on some unsuspecting
mouse.

What urge today makes you
so bold and rude,
to stray
and take the preferential place
of a much larger
bird of prey?

Is it hunger
or the hunt inbred
that makes you take this risk,
or some Napoleonic thread
that drives you, though smaller,
to conquer dread
and seize the prize?



Bread of Life

By Yvonne Kays

Murmurs ripple through the crowd.
What kind of Messiah
is this?
Eat His flesh, drink His blood?
Some scornfully mutter,
He is mad.
Many begin to slink away.
Even the Twelve flounder in bewilderment.

Today
the mystery revealed
to all who believe.
Humbly we bow, tear sliding down the cheek,
hands reverently cup the bread, the wine.
Remembering
the unthinkable sacrifice.
Jesus Christ
the
Bread of Life.



My Gregorian Year

By Judith A. Litchfield



The New Year yawned,
rising slowly from the cold horizon
swathing a pearlescent pink over the charcoaled past
My rising eyelid beheld
the developing day
staring boldly back at me.
We faced off.

Wisdom whispered of unknown give and take.
Humbly I yield, with grit and grace,
To tease a game of fate, a gamble.

My Mother Dear

By Linda L. Kruschke

I buried my mother
in my journal in red ink
with large angry letters
that accused her of dying
on purpose just to spite me

I buried my mother
in the Firehole River at Yellowstone
among the towering green trees
with eagles soaring above
leaving me wondering if she watched

I buried my mother
when I was 23
and she was 61
and then again in my heart
as I forgave a loss
that was never her fault

and red ink faded to green



To Know and Be Known

By Linda L. Kruschke

The warm earth
beneath my feet trembles
with knowledge of our Creator

We have this in common,
the earth and me—
the One who knows us
desires to be known

Sometimes I forget Him,
forget I am His beloved

The earth never does

God's Love

By Mag Leis

Life sometimes feels empty. Like a giant barrel. The kind made up of wooden slats arranged vertically and held together with a few rusted-out nails and two or three metal straps.

The barrel, if situated correctly and the sun is shining, allows big rays to pour right through. It's the kind of vessel that even when something good or wonderful is put into it, in a few short moments everything good escapes through the massive spaces.



Emptiness. Not just emptiness. The emptiness is accompanied by complete lack of ability to be filled up. The memory of fullness is not too far gone. In fact, the memory is close, very close. It is what keeps hope lingering. Not real hope. This hope is like a wisp of steam that escapes a pot of simmering stew through the little tiny hole near the handle of a stockpot lid. Not enough to satisfy, just enough to entice.

Hope. It's the kind of emotion our souls long for. Hope is pursued even when our hearts have given up. It's something we seek without consciously meaning to. Our mouths say, "I quit. I give up. There's nothing worth pursuing anymore. Life is empty and without meaning." But somewhere deep inside of us our senses pick up the slightest scent of hope and we are propelled.

Propelled. Somehow pushed forward and in that forward movement we begin to look. Look for something, anything. We allow our hearts to believe that there is some goodness out there. Goodness that will remain. Goodness that will not go away. Goodness that not only stays but builds.

Goodness. The kind of goodness that is enveloped in love. Love that fills up the spaces between those vertical slats. Love that is thick and pure. Love like warm honey on a cold winter day. Love that doesn't run away. Love so strong that no matter what you do you cannot resist it.

Love. Love that is patient and kind. Love that is not angry or self-seeking. Love that honors and does not dishonor. Love that protects, trusts, hopes and perseveres. Love that never fails. God's love.

Family Shopping

By Mary McIntosh

I was only shopping, I thought, and suddenly beside me the man—large and grave, blonde, foreign—maybe Russian—telling his boy beside him what he needed to know about limes and apples, bananas and pears.

Shopping, I thought, and moving through the store, stopped at the huge wooden box of very tiny pears, wondered what anyone would use them for, so tiny, hardly a bite or two. Must be for jam, I thought.

Then she was there in her headscarf dutifully filling plastic bags with pears and I asked her, what do you do with these pears? She looked up and said, Eat them, we eat them, and I was quieted.

Shopping, I thought, and saw father and boy on the other side of the box, looking and now waiting, listening. Would they forgive my simple ignorance of their ways, would they understand?

Would they understand that I was used to more than one bite or two? Could I understand that pears, though tiny, can be sweet, especially to those who have known over the oceans and years, a scarcity of pears?



In the Garden

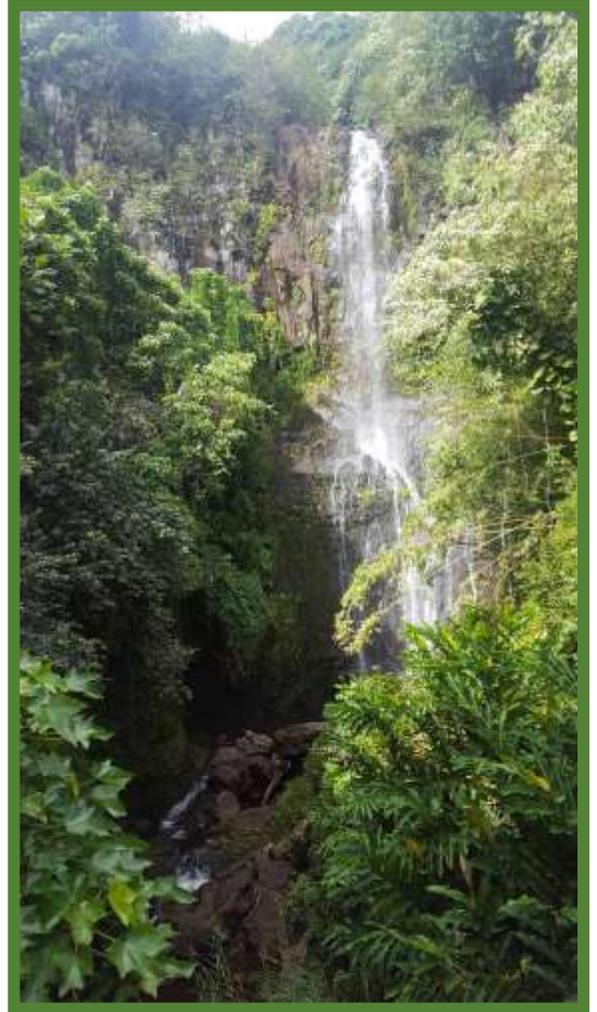
By Mary McIntosh

So this morning I came to my
husband in the garden and said,
It's Eve, come to work with you
in the garden.

If only we were really that innocent, all
happy and pleased to be with our
Father there and He pleased with us.

That was before. They didn't know
and we never know when that
slithering serpent will make a
reappearance, our days spent in
guarded gentleness, sharing only
touches not bursts of wisdom
lest that dark knowledge run
away with us before we realize
its danger and hide. No, we wait for

His breath to warm, refresh, inspire.
We wait. We are children, playing in the
sun—and rain—pulling down
branches and picking that lush,
ripe fruit, so permissible to touch.
All because they already made the
worst mistake they could have
and lost their Garden. They wait, too.



Faithfulness

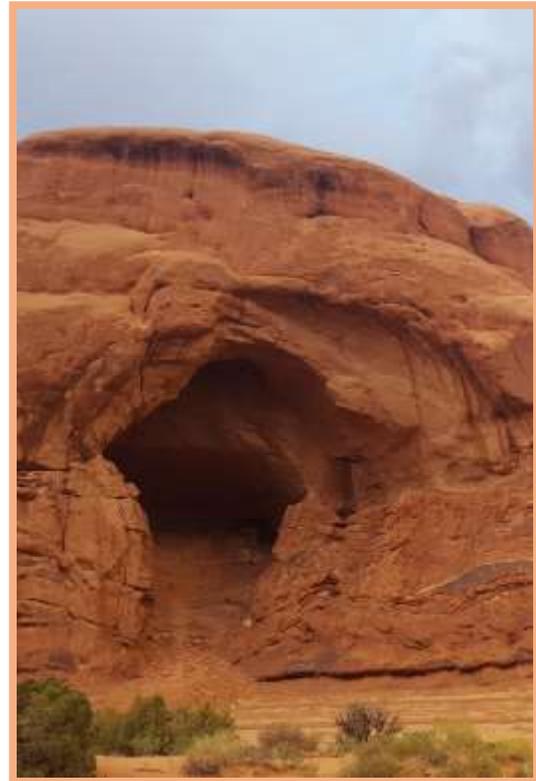
By Rachel Lulich

Why am I walking alone in this cavern?
Even your presence seems so far away.
I see the signs that you've carved to direct me,
But my faith's flickering, as I delay.

I am not troubled, for I know you're here.
You have ordained it, and it will be so.
I can't help wondering where we are going,
But all you tell me is, "Step out and go."

I have been learning to trust through surrender,
Leaving contingency planning to you.
All I can do is press on and be faithful;
You'll lead and guide me as I wait for you.

So I will praise you, Lord, out of this chaos;
Your Spirit's moving in ways I can't see.
I will surrender my need to be sovereign
In the assurance that you'll care for me.



Isaiah 65

By Rachel Lulich

We didn't ask for you today –
We sat among the graves;
Said once again, "keep to yourself"
And wandered, unafraid.

We walked after our empty thoughts,
A sacrifice of smoke.
We didn't answer when you called
Or listen when you spoke.

But Lord, you'll lure us back in,
Surprising with your nearness,
Employing all that speaks to us;
Conviction with a promise:

We will remember what we forgot –
Before we call, you'll answer.
While we're yet speaking, you will hear –
Our God and Priest and Master.

The Horse of Death

By Rebecca Johnson

I closed my eyes; they bounded back
Wide open once again,
But all the gold I'd ever known
Had flown like foam on wind.
The bud, the breeze, the bobbing hills
To shadowland had gone.
The fingertips that traced my skin,
Mere ashes, dull and wan.

The world was gray 'til—lo!
A spark lit up the distant sky.
A golden horse then gamboled up
And looked me in the eye.
“Would you stay here in shadowland?”
He asked and tossed his head.
I gestured 'round the world all gray.
“Where might I go instead?”

The laugh he gave was bright and clear.
“Mount up and you will see.
I am called the horse of Death.
Will you take heart and ride with me?
Beyond the shadows here there waits
A land of ever-sun.
The time you knew before is past;
A new time has begun.”

No answer more I sought from him
But softly begging leave,
I took a fist of mane and swung
Up on the golden steed.
Then—marvelous of marvels yet!
Two silken wings unfurled
To right and left beside each knee
Like blankets o'er me curled.

Then up he leapt, the horse of Death
Like lightning from the ground,
And up we flew, his wings a roar
Of rolling, thundering sound.

The gray of hill, the gray of tree
Slipped from my head and heart.
I felt it grasp, I felt it cling,
And then it fell apart.

And in its place, a prick of pearls
With stardust glimmering.
We flew to meet it, swift and sure,
Beyond the galaxy.
It was a gate! A charming thing
Of arching, ivied age,
Swathed in sweet wisteria
And wafting scented sage.

“Here we are,” the horse of Death
Spoke as he set me down.
We landed on an emerald swath
With birdsong circling round.
I looked at gate and then at horse.
“I dare not enter in.
The world beyond this gate will bar
Me for my ashy skin.”

“Ashy skin?” the horse replied.
“Look closely, are you sure?
The fire of a soul lives long,
But ashes don't endure.”
I dropped my eyes, without much hope,
But what then did I see?
Flashes! Flares! of color bright
Embraced and raced in me.

“There you have it,” Death said low.
“You need not fear to stroll
The land unseen beyond this gate
With His light in your soul.”
And with these words cascading
Like the ocean over me,
I stepped beyond the gate and straight
Into Eternity.

Author Biographies

JoAnne Bowles lives in Bend, Oregon. She homeschools her two children and enjoys writing. Find out more about her at her personal blog thoughtsfromjo.com.

Dorothy Doede lives in Aloha, Oregon. She loves studying His story and writing about God's storytelling and creativity.

Rebecca Johnson, of Central City, Nebraska, is waiting to see a shooting star fly from Orion's bow. Until then, she writes fantasy, songs, and poetry from Nebraska's windswept plains.

Yvonne Kays writes from Central Oregon. She loves to hike, garden, and fish. She writes inspirational short stories and poetry and recently finished a WWII story.

Julie Kepler lives in Banks, Oregon, with her husband of 20 years. She loves writing about our wonderful Creator and the beauty of His creation.

Linda L. Kruschke, of Lake Oswego, Oregon, and author of two poetry books, blogs at AnotherFearlessYear.net and AnchoredVoices.com. Wife, mother, memoirist, and recovering lawyer, she passionately shares God's healing grace.

Mag Leis, of Newport, Oregon, is a wife and mother who loves sharing the hope of Jesus in her daily life. Her heartfelt words have inspired many people.

Judith A. Litchfield, a Portland resident since 1966, raised three daughters while working in a professional career. Her interests include genealogy, travel, writing, family, and working part-time as a health insurance agent.

Rachel Lulich is a writer and freelance developmental editor. She has self-published a collection of poems about faith and was recently published in *Short and Sweet: A Different Beat*. In her free time, Rachel enjoys reading, singing, and traveling. Originally from the Pacific Northwest, she currently lives in Slovakia.

Mary McIntosh, Ph.D., is a poet, teacher, freelance writer, and editor who has taught English and creative writing at colleges in the northeast, northwest, and California. Now semi-retired and a resident of Southern Oregon, she enjoys writing poems that reflect God's intervention in our lives.