

OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

By Donna Turpin

He heals the brokenhearted

And binds up their wounds.

Psalm 147:3 NKJV

WRITING THE STORY

At my desk in Southeast Missouri, August 2025

Fingers flexed and then clasped. I said, “Which ski trip was it? Breckenridge or Vail, and in which year?”.

Pushing my back into my chair, my hands pressed against the stand-up writing table, I pondered the worldwide sorority I could never join. Birth mothers living the dream. My dream.

How could I write this story if I couldn’t remember the exact place or people? Substitute names for this part? Journal notes would help, but I didn’t have them.

Plopped back into my chair, two things I could not shake.

How it made me feel.

And the steps I took to survive.

Truth was, the heart of this story happened hundreds, maybe a hundred-thousand times, in similar scenarios played out over four decades. Closing my eyes, I took a deep breath.

Perhaps I should begin like all my other letters?

Fingers poised, first one key, then a flood of fresh words flowed onto my screen as I composed the next letter to the daughter I always wanted.

Why did the week in the Rockies have to be so awkward?

Normally, I could handle lunch with a group.

But time with moms was easiest one-on-one, like last month when I met a high school friend for a playdate in the park. Sitting cross-legged on a quilt, we munched on peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. My friend's three-year-old said, "Two," when I offered him a stalk of celery. He carried them to plant in the sandbox next to us and said, "Ta da! Look what I made!"

Soon he was back when his five-year-old sister brought out my homemade chocolate chips. Pushing these children on the swing, telling stories, looking for bugs and butterflies.

My friend nuzzled her baby, now asleep, then gently laid her by me on an extra stadium blanket while she scurried to reel the toddler away from the lagoon.

Sunbeams cascaded across my face as I gently stroked the infant's tiny ear. So perfect. Each feature is a miracle of God's creation. As I extended the bag of homemade cookies, my friend flashed a toothy grin. "Whew! Glad you were here."

Dappled light through branches fell across the sleeping child. What a perfect day shared with this little family. As we finished with watermelon slices, our picnic complete.

My eyes fell back on the manuscript in front of me—my work I progress.

Where was I?

With each keystroke, the recollection grew stronger.

Transported back through over forty years of memories, my heart raced to a week in the mountains of Colorado.

A brisk wind propelled us, almost blinded by the glint like diamonds reflecting off the fresh snow as we trudged into the condo after a day on the slopes. Immersed in the ski trip memory, my fingers flew.

Goggles and knitted ski caps stashed inside our ski jackets, I carried rented ski boots and poles to our bedroom while the guys built a fire.

I could hear the water running in the kitchen as Pamela said, “My kids say I make the best spaghetti.”

Mary popped the cork on a bottle of Chianti. “We better put a lid on that stockpot, or the water will take forever to boil.”

Resting on the comforter in our room, hearing the chatter two doors down, I turned onto my side. The aroma of garlic, peppers, mushrooms, and onion drifted through the unit.

Mary’s voice blasted with authority. “Did I tell you about the time Shawn and Riley made spaghetti when we were camping? They accidentally dumped all the noodles.”

Flames danced between oak logs as the Douglas Fir crackled.

I tried to tune out the kitchen voices, but Mary’s commanded attention. “There we were, in the middle of nowhere. I said, ‘Kids, that was dinner.’ We all looked at the pile of noodles interspersed with grass and river gravel. Riley said, ‘Mom, what are we going to do? I’m starving.’ Soon, Shawn appeared with a sleeve of crackers and peanut butter. So, no gourmet sauce that night. I’ve got the best camping kids. So resourceful.”

My arm hung off the edge of the bed. Motionless until I covered my head with a pillow.

MINI MOM CONVENTION

At a condo in Colorado, gathered around the fire after dinner, estimated to be in the late 1980s

Stuck between opposites, I hugged a rustic print pillow in the center of the condominium great room.

Gathered on the mountain for a week on the slopes, young women chatted endlessly with anecdotes from the kitchen spilling into the dining room.

Half-time and commercials blared at the other end while the guys congregated around a big-screen television on brown leather furniture. Flames rose and fell with their raucous laughter as another tab popped, and an aluminum can joined the towering mass on the fireplace hearth.

Bundled in cashmere in the kitchen, Pamela turned as she dried the last pan. A group of women in sweatshirts and buffalo-plaid chatted at the heavy wooden dining table.

As she placed the utensils on a rack, Pamela said, “Let me show you the tee shirts I bought today for Will and Lisa. I talked to a mother over hot chocolate in the lodge, and she showed me. I got one for me and Bill, too.”

Salad dressing bottles in hand, Mary said, “Let me stick these in the fridge, then we can compare.” As she stopped by the table, peering over Kelly’s hoop, Mary said, “Let me see the pattern. What are you cross-stitching?”

Kelly flashed the design. “It’s for Angela’s birthday. She loves pink and purple!”

Relentless the anecdotes continued. On the chairlift, over lunch, while shopping and cooking. When we stopped to warm up in the lodge.

All week I thought, surely now someone will stop talking.

I waited for a pause, for the conversation to turn. Could we talk about a movie or book? Maybe even a recipe, or another place they traveled to.

But instead, more photos and stories of daycare reports and third-grade field trips.

No different tonight in the condo.

As I scanned the faces, joyfully exchanging around me, my fist tightened around the jute binding as I scrunched the corners of the pillow.

I'm attending a mini-mom convention. It never stops!

Except for the awkward moments.

Like when I said in a lull two days earlier, "My dog has the cutest way of greeting my little neighborhood friends. We hear all about fourth grade and the challenges of middle school as they run to greet us and fall into step, then hang out on my front porch."

Followed by stares.

Then silence.

Before they resumed elaborate descriptions of their children's gymnastics outfits, tutors, and hunting escapades.

Staring beyond wall glass in the condo, evergreen branches swayed, covered with snowflakes mounds.

Voices near the fire rose as the men bellowed.

REALITY OVERLOAD

Stuck between two groups, I pulled the moose print pillow closer and rested my chin on the edge.

Around the dining table the women laughed as Mary pulled a sack from an oversized black leather purse. "Here's what I bought for Shawn and Riley, too."

At the other end of the great room, husbands huddled around a big screen TV. Bottles of Coors and cans of Bud Light rested on the fireplace hearth and a center coffee table.

From my perch on the edge of the kitchen, I crossed my legs, foot flexing as it tapped repeatedly in the air.

Focused on the flames in the fireplace, dancing at the end of the room, I shifted my feet and tried not to make eye contact.

Joan sipped a glass of chardonnay and said, “I got the boys’ belts and bandanas. Plus, sweatshirts. I may have to ship part of this home. Here’s a picture from Christmas. Hard to believe Tony was once twenty inches and seven pounds.”

I would talk constantly about my child, too, if I had one.

If.

TUG OF WAR

The internal voice returned.

See, they all have children, but you don’t. And you won’t.

Closing my eyes, I. shouted internally. Shut up! Go away. I won’t listen.

Your husband said never. Never ever.

The pillow hugged tighter, my chin leaned on my fist, I rocked on an ottoman. A silent scream flew through my body. Constrained. I pulled the pillow tighter as my eyes darted.

Where can I escape? Would they understand?

Kelly said, “Speaking of birthdays, does anyone know of a place I can get themed birthday cakes? I want something spectacular. Angela will turn six only once.”

Closing my eyes, my breathing shallow, I swallowed hard.

How do I handle this? I really like these women. And they don’t mean to hurt me.

But it’s been four days.

The moms laughed and traded stories of delivery room contractions to C-sections and swimming lessons.

First breaths.

First kisses.

First steps.

Each word, each story, slashed me as surely as a skier crashed on the mountainside, but there was no one to stitch me up, no medic snowmobile to deploy to the slopes or this condo.

Bare. Raw.

I stared as Bruce placed another log on the fire and poked the embers while my heart bled.

Carol said, “Yes, I just had a ballerina cake made for Jennifer. Did I tell you she’s in a traveling dance group?”

My heart pounded, escalating like a downhill run. What started as a slow descent with a wedge stance on green slopes picked up speed.

With my emotions cascading at the blue level, fist pressed to my mouth, I pulled the sofa pillow closer.

Would they think I’d gone off the deep end if I threw this pillow to the ground and stomped it or at least pounded it and screamed, “Enough! Please stop.”

How could I even ask?

The children were their life.

Emotions ramped to a fever pitch as I imagined an out-of-control skier haphazardly roaring down an icy black diamond run, splat on the snow, buried, in need of a medic on a snowmobile.

But who would call 911 to rescue me? Did they even see what this was doing to me? Could they possibly understand?

Carried on a tidal wave from within, I quietly slipped through an adjoining bedroom.

I’ve got to get out of here before I scream or wail.

As I opened the door to escape beyond the kitchen, I glanced over my shoulder.

I know they don't understand, but I can't listen anymore. Not tonight.

With one hand on my coat, I wondered. Should I go back and say I'm leaving?

On the fringe, I lingered without asking questions. Listening.

They want it all, too.

Just like me.

We always have.

I pulled my stocking cap tighter over my ears and shoved my gloved hands into my pockets as I quietly closed the door.

ESCAPE TO SURVIVE

An hour later, outside the condo in a courtyard

Steam rose from hot chocolate as I took a seat on a bench with a view of the window wall of our unit. I could see Joan pouring wine for Carol, and Jackie leaning attentively as the women lounged. Shrill laughter mixed with boisterous guffaws as I watched the men slapping hands in high fives and peeling off greenbacks.

Icy particles hit my face while I pulled my collar tighter.

The inner monologue continued, "Why don't you just admit it? You don't belong here."

These are lovely people. They invited me.

I sat for a short time, but I couldn't shut it off. "You'll never be perfect enough. You couldn't even make it down the mountain as fast as they needed you to with a storm coming in earlier this week."

No, no, no! I'm so glad I could come.

But what do I do with this heaviness?

The thoughts shot through my resolve like a machine gun. “You can’t have it all. Not now. Never. You don’t have a baby, and you can’t even try, not unless there’s agreement.”

I’ve made it through most of the week until now.

Shut up! Enough!

Finally, looking at the wall of glass again, I paused, then returned to the bench.

I should have told someone I was leaving.

But I couldn’t.

My lip trembling, and with fuzzy vision, hands clasped across my mouth contained a silent scream as frosty puffs filled the air from my nostrils.

Choking back the tears, I wished I could be somewhere private. To let it all out, this pent-up grief and awkwardness.

Like not being chosen for the kickball team in grade school, but more. No one meant to hurt me. My heart, now raw from the barrage of photos and stories of their children, needed release. There is no escape tonight or for the rest of my life.

Damp cold seeped from the stone bench through my jeans leg as I shivered and sipped the last of the now tepid drink.

A few stars visible in the night sky reminded me that God is with me. I could usually handle baby talk and photos for a while. But this week, my grief driven inward felt like I could explode.

I hope I can slip in unnoticed when I come back in. They won’t understand, and I don’t want to cause problems.

My gloved hand poised on the handle, tentatively opened to the kitchen.

Just a few more days, Donna. You can do this.

Enjoy the people.

But be gentle with yourself.

Mary was stirring hot chocolate and said, “Donna! When did you leave? Come and join us.”

I said, “Thanks, but a bubble bath is calling.”

“Okay, suit yourself. That chill was brisk when you opened the door. If you change your mind, come back down.”

Can I wash it all away? The heaviness? The wounds? The division with the world?

Will it always hurt this much?

Where do I fit in?

TAKEAWAYS

GOD’S PROMISES REMAIN, EVEN WHEN THINGS SEEM IMPOSSIBLE

Irreconcilable Differences - Childless by Marriage

Nothing could heal the pain of being childless-by-marriage. Even now, it is very difficult to realize what my college-age choices cost for the rest of my life. The idiom proved true. Either you’re pregnant or you’re not.

One of a long list of losses brought about by me not being fully honest or aware while dating and engaged. A prison of vastly different perspectives, only possible to heal with God’s help and a change of thinking.

I’ve been told time heals all wounds.

But then again, for some things, maybe not.

When there was no answer for losses like I envisioned my life to be, trusting Jesus to fill the holes His way, a different way, required surrender.

Lamentations 3:22-23 promises God's mercies are new every morning, to carry us through. Helping us face one more day. One more choice. Another twist. Leaning on Him when we can't bear the pain any longer.

Knowing there would always be something missing because of my rebellion. Missed windows with no answers other than surrender.

Accepting Jesus loves us through losses with great compassion.

Surrender with gratefulness and forgiveness, for the women who never meant to hurt me. It's not their fault. In the words of Jesus, in my humanness, I had to pray, "Father, please forgive them, for they really have no idea how much

And forgiveness for myself. for

My Prayer for the Daughter I Always Wanted

Heavenly Father,

Please let the woman reading this hear loud and clear.

If you had been my daughter, I would have whipped out my wallet, too, in the 1980s, showing printed pictures snipped from your school pack, like we share on cell phones today. Talking about every loose tooth, cute saying, and your part in the Christmas pageant at church.

You are no mistake. Psalm 127:3 assures us children are a gift from God.

You are a cherished vessel the Lord longs to pour through as He wraps you in His arms. A daughter of the creator of the universe, He has known you for all time and eternity, and He loves you more than any human ever could.

Jesus, I pray you will help this young lady redeem broken dreams and forge new beginnings with the best You salvage from her past. Let her know You love her immensely, ready to redeem her, to take her from empty to overflowing.

Giving her peace for those places where the answer is not exactly what she hoped for. Helping her make the most of what she receives, being gentle with herself and others. In Jesus's name.

Amen,

Donna

My dear reader,

I hope you've enjoyed this bonus story in the mountains of Colorado.

If you've joined me on the *Empty to Overflowing* book journey, you already know I prepared a collection of stories packaged as *Letters for the Daughter I Always Wanted*, each crafted with purpose. If you haven't read the book yet, I hope you enjoy it.

This narrative started at my desk in Missouri, where I'm also penning this to you today.

Drop me a note on the form on our website contact page at PrepareLovePraise.org or DonnaTurpin.com. I'd love to hear from you.

With much love,

Donna

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This memoir is a work of creative nonfiction. While all the stories in this book are a truthful recollection of actual events in the author's life, some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved.

This writing and the eight-step FLOWINGSTM method is a process used to help the author sort through options and grow. Please consult a licensed medical or mental health professional for professional healthcare opinions. If you are in danger, seek help immediately by calling 911 or seeking assistance from area support networks.