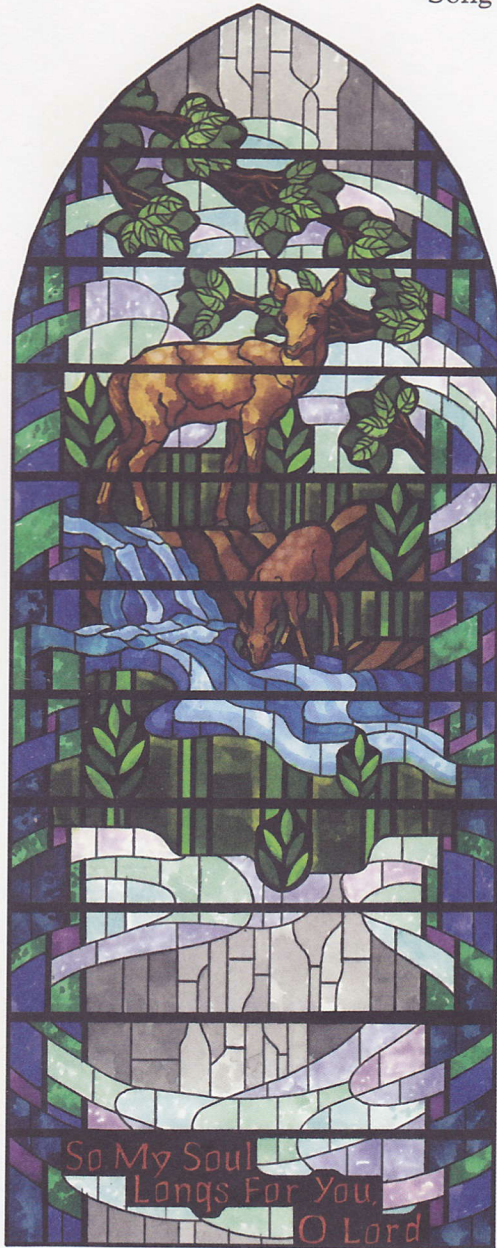


"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful."

Song of Songs 4:1



THE SMITH FAMILY CHAPEL

Dear Friend,

It's my belief that every girl dreams of the day she will become a bride and live "happily ever after." It is the one day of her life where she is her most beautiful, and one of her lifelong dreams becomes a reality. Her wedding day is the one day she lets go of her girlish dreams and joins hands with her partner in life. Together, they begin on the path God chose for them.

Allow me to share the story of how this wedding chapel was inspired by the Holy Spirit through the lives of one family, each one of us being used to accomplish what I believe was His plan. The planning, building and completion of this Chapel are a testimony to the belief that big plans begin with just a small step of faith. None of us could have known what lay ahead the day Steve took me by the hand and, along with the children, led me down the aisle for church membership.

On June 5, 1986, the Smith family joined Riverbend: Steve, Sarah, Rayner and Rachel. It was my thirty-fifth

birthday present. Because church membership has always been an important part of my life, Steve knew it would mean a great deal to me for our family. We had just lost our home and were living in a borrowed patio home rent-free. It was a gift from a dear man, Dr. Harold Skaggs. It was the beginning time of a downward spiral that included the loss of everything we had, except each other. It was a five-year period in our lives where God's faithfulness provided for us in miraculous ways through His people.

Over the next ten years, Steve worked laboriously to help build a national telecommunications company. I was alone with the children every week from Monday through Friday, and he would return home on the weekends. For half of this time, I was teaching school in the Lake Travis ISD where our children attended, and from where they graduated in 1996 and 1999. We are two very passionate people. Steve had his dreams of success, and I had equal ambition for family. But when we put together the work and struggles of yesterday, they held power to achieve a plan for tomorrow. Through God's power, our reality

today has far surpassed even what Steve and I could have dreamed. And I believe that's what God wants to do for each of us – surpass even our own dreams.

When our walk down the aisle includes a heart of commitment for each other, along with the understanding that we are entering a covenant with God, we enter into a bigger picture for His purpose in our marriage right at that moment. Perhaps it is about being fruitful with His gift of children, expanding our tents to minister to others, and living with an awareness of God's grace in our homes that God surpasses our dreams when we marry. Only then do we live to grow beyond our personal dreams and agendas. At that moment of recognition, we take His hand and then journey down the path He has chosen for us.

When I walked down the aisle with my dear father to join Steve at the altar, I did not know that. We were married in the church where I had been all my life – Trinity Methodist Church in El Paso, Texas. My thoughts were only of being Steve's bride, hearing him whisper to me at the altar, "You look beautiful," and embarking on a life of

living “happily ever after.” I was unaware that those vows were also an eternal bond with Christ to be His bride as He joined two believers in an intimate relationship. It was only after years of being on the battlefield for my family that I began to embrace a bigger picture.

Steve has always been an extremely positive person whose dreams could never be caged. A true entrepreneur at heart, his dreams and plans went far beyond normal expectations. Because of this quality, he was more able to grasp hold of other people’s dreams and visions. Perhaps this is how God joined the lives of Steve and Gerald Mann.

Upon his success, Steve felt the Lord’s calling to put Gerald Mann’s ministry on a national weekly program. Steve wanted everyone to have the opportunity to hear Gerald’s message as he had during his time of loss.

Fourteen years earlier, Steve had lost all ambition, focus and purpose to his life. To know him as the productive person he is now, you would not recognize him as he was then. I do not really recall how long he lapsed into this

“couch potato” version of Steve – it could have been a matter of weeks or months, but it was a most helpless and desperate time for him, both spiritually and emotionally. However, Gerald’s weekly local broadcast brought him through. Steve believes that this is one of the reasons he was allowed to become so successful. He pays closest attention to this calling, and it is witness to the fact that God has hold of him.

At the same time Steve decided to put his money into the media ministry, I wanted to be a part of the new church building – which we refer to as “Home for Hope” – into which Riverbend was expanding. Steve made it very clear to both Gerald and I that his investment interests did not go beyond Gerald’s television ministry. He loves and believes in the way that Gerald delivers the message of salvation to God’s people. But for my part, because I had always tithed, I started tithing ten per cent of my monthly allowance to the building fund.

At one point, when Home for Hope needed over \$600,000 to move forward, Gerald asked me if I thought

he could present that request to Steve. I just replied that Steve would always listen to him because he loved him, but he might say no. Gerald did not want to ask because Steve had made it so clear that he was not interested in investing in the building. That morning, Gerald walked into Steve's study in our home. Steve peered over his half-glasses to Gerald and before Gerald had even asked, Steve said, "How much do you need?" Now, we were a part of Home for Hope, too!

Home for Hope opened on Easter Sunday, 1998. We were at the first service opening day and sat very close to the front to be as near to Gerald as possible. It was a very emotional time for Gerald, as you can well imagine, because this had been his dream for twenty years. He began the service by recognizing the people in the congregation who had helped him in a large way. When he called Steve, Sarah, Rayner and Rachel Smith, we were barely able to stand as we were broken with tears – each of us. Barely able to gain our composure, we struggled through the service. At the end of the service, our precious daughter Rachel, still in tears, walked over to her father,

who was also bathed in tears, and whispered to him, "Daddy, I'm so proud of you today; of all the things you buy and give money to, this is the best!" She went on to tell Steve and I, at a later time, that Steve's testimony had changed her life. Because she had not had a lot of direction in her life about what she wanted to do, she knew at that moment she wanted to spend her life in service to others. She still cannot put into words the impact that time had on her heart, and I feel the same way. She loves Gerald so much that she was just as happy for him, and was so thankful to be able to participate in his dream. Later on, I wanted to talk about it with Steve. I asked him about what was going through his mind that brought him to tears. He said it was the fact that God was allowing him to be part of something that big.

The following Sunday, Steve was out of town and Rayner had gone back to college. Therefore, Rachel, still in high school, and I went to church alone. Unknown to me, Easter Sunday, Rayner had commented to my sister Jamie, who was visiting at the time, that he did not know where anyone could get married in this church since it's

built in an amphitheatre style like the churches in the Holy Land were designed. Rachel had also asked me that morning, "Mama, where will I get married in this church?" I replied, "Well, not in here, but maybe at home," to which she replied, "Just so Dr. Mann marries me." It was that second Sunday in the new church that God had placed on my heart the idea to build a wedding chapel.

I had been inspired to begin writing a book on marriage and my spiritual journey. It was to be for the purpose of giving people hope in marriage by sharing personal stories of God's faithfulness in my own. I had been talking about it for three years, but when the inspiration for the chapel came, I thought, "I'll sell the book and with the proceeds, build the chapel!"

Six weeks later, I was off to our ranch to begin writing my book. Almost three years later, I am on the third rewrite and still have not published! But at that time, I was on fire and shared my idea with Steve who spoke with Gerald the following day. By that afternoon, Gerald, Mike Rinehart and I were walking the property.

I did not know then that there was already a site for that very purpose, but that it was a low priority because the church still needed more parking, more educational buildings, and still more additions to the church building itself. During our walk, Gerald also shared plans for a walkway that winds down to a creek and becomes the Remembrance Gardens. When Steve heard of this, he expanded Gerald's vision and helped birth what Remembrance Gardens is today. He was given inspiration for what it has become, as I was for the chapel. At the entrance to the walk, there was a perfect place for the chapel.

All of this never would have happened had Steve not given wings to my dream by listening to my heart. It has been a time that our worlds joined hands not only monetarily but also spiritually. I have witnessed Steve's love for me on a much higher plane through the creation of this chapel. This has been one of the priceless rewards of my surrender and obedience to God's leading in my marriage.

During the time of planning and working on the chapel, it came to me that one of the biggest contributing factors

to my dedicated desire to be a wife and mother, and have the love for my family that I do, is Steve. When we were dating, he sent me flowers on Mother's Day with an enclosure card that read, "Even future mothers should be thought of on Mother's Day." Even though it scared me to death – to know that he saw and appreciated in me that aspect of a woman – it was also the water that nurtured a seed of desire which had been planted in me my entire life. For I have known all of my life that all I ever wanted to be was a wife and a mother.

This love and fight for my family, and even for my own life, has often been painful. At a time I was struggling and losing heart, my dear friend and spiritual mentor, Joyce Landorf Heatherley, sent me the verses that are written on the walls of the narthex. Not knowing that these verses had saved my life one time, Heather McKinney, the chapel's architect, suggested their message as it related to family. They also had a personal meaning for her as she used them in her own wedding. At this time, my entire struggle of holding on became God's glory.

“For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in Heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches, He may strengthen you with power through His spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

Ephesians 3:14-19

To me, the wedding chapel was the perfect tribute for me to make in this lifetime because I have always worked so hard in my marriage and so love my family. For me, the family is the most beautiful of all of God’s creations. I can bask forever in the sunshine of my children’s faces; absorb nourishment through my husband’s attention and touch; grow from the resolve which comes after open, honest, unconditional communication; and thrive on the

genuine laughter the four of us share. Oh, the love, the love, – my family is my passion!

They are my purpose and my dream.

A Labor of Love Begins

In January 2000, we broke ground on the chapel after many meetings and plans had been drawn by talented individuals who seemed to “read my mind.” The birth of this chapel came from the church in which Steve and I grew up in with our families; it was where we were married. From a longing for its traditional appearance, came the vision for this chapel. God brought together my soul’s deepest desire and joined it with a gifted group of individuals.

Heather McKinney was the architect chosen for its creation. She and her talented assistant, Julie Beyt, created this beautiful building by simply listening to my heart. At its completion, I sat back in amazement at how it has captured my dreams through their talents. It was a testimony to me that God was the master architect in His plans as He used each of us as a link in the chain to accomplish its building.

And from the beginning, with a quiet and incredible strength, has been Mike Rinehart. From the time he heard of this plan and walked the property with me and Gerald (as Gerald's assistant at the time), he became the leader in seeing this project through. Not only has he nurtured its plans, he has nurtured me spiritually to be able to keep up with the incredible changes which have taken place in my life over the last three years. With his love for God and obedience to His calling, Mike has been a giant for God in this project. I will be forever grateful for his support, encouragement and leadership in the building of this chapel.

The Stained Glass

The design and style of the chapel were second in comparison to the interest I had in the stained glass. I have probably been the most intimately involved in the inspired creation of their beauty. Knowing how the many stained glass windows of my childhood church had fed me spiritually as I grew up, I wanted it to do the same for all who entered the Smith Family Chapel. I narrow-mindedly

entered the project with traditional stained glass windows in mind. Then, as Heather and Julie opened my vision to include the beautiful outdoors that surrounded the building site, I began to incorporate a little abstract with the traditional. As we explored and interviewed many artisans, the ideas seemed to come together in a common theme – water.

After all, our church is on the bend of the Colorado River, which incorporates a stream through the property. I loved the idea of some clear glass providing an entrance to God's beautiful outdoors and light into this beautifully dark and warm chapel. I could just imagine the dark wood lit up by the sun coming through its stained glass as the bride descends down its aisle towards the man to whom she pledges her heart.

To me, the stained glass would be the deciding factor in the personality of the entire chapel. It would be their responsibility to communicate the voice of its heart and the message it would carry to its people. The windows would house the soul of this creation.

So with much prayer and a listening heart, I searched God's word for four scriptures that would be His eternal message to His people who sat in these pews and fed from their inspiration. Sometimes I would like to be allowed a glimpse into every heart that received hope and inspiration from these windows and this chapel. Only then would I ever understand God's full plan in this project. Someday, when I am with Him, I know I will. Right now, today, it just awes me to know that He has allowed me the privilege of being a part of this creation.

As you, dear reader, fill your heart with the priceless words of Ephesians 3:14-19, step into the chapel and look to the windows. They were designed by Cavallini of San Antonio.

Feed My Sheep!

The first inspiration came from John 21:15-17, where through scratching around in my search for wholeness and purpose in my life, God's message to me was, "Feed my sheep." Remembering that with life in Christ, there is

only one flock and one shepherd, we are to help one another. It reads:

“When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

John 21:15-17

Although this scripture was not directly related to water, the artist placed the sheep by the side of living water to receive life. When we are able to focus on helping someone else, we are pleasing to God. To feed His sheep could

mean someone in our family, a friend or a passerby. It could even be ourselves. May you carry the refreshment from your time in this chapel to feed others; either lost who need to be brought back, or hungry for God's love.

My Soul Longs for You!

The second inspiration came from the book of Psalms.

“As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O Lord.”

Psalms 42:1

In this world today with its media influence, it seems we are reminded of all of our outer flaws. We are encouraged to fix everything about ourselves with this gadget or that diet or some trend. Even religion and the way we see God has been altered to fit a formula to fix us. My eyes and soul fell upon this scripture at a time when I was weary of “doing.” It caused me to shift my focus from the outer to the inner, and care for my soul tenderly. It was the beginning of the time I began living from the

inside out. Its words embraced my hurting heart with nourishment. May it keep you ever mindful that there is nothing but God's love that can fill the voids in your heart. He created us, like the deer, to thirst and yearn for Him. May your heart become aware of your great need for Him as you receive nourishment from this window.

Do Not Be Afraid!

The third inspiration was really a tie in my heart for a long time. Both of the scriptures are related to fear. We all have storms in our life that seem to rage out of control – out of our control anyway. It is at those times when we fear we will drown, that Jesus wants us to crawl aboard the raft of his loving arms as He calms our fears. Because I am a fearful person by nature, I cleave to His words when He tells me not to be afraid. At a time I was surrounded by fear in confronting a particular situation in my life, He gave me Exodus 14:13.

“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and see the deliverance that the Lord will accomplish FOR you today.”

Exodus 14:13

But in relating this common feeling in God’s children to one of Jesus’ stories with His disciples, I thought of the storm, which frightened the disciples when Jesus calmed the storm and offered peace. Also, this story was related to water.

“The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they were terrified. But He said to them, “It is I; do not be afraid.”

John 6:18-20

It is incredibly comforting to know that we do not have to be afraid or intimidated by God. In connecting with Him, we can feel safe, listened to and valued. With Jesus

our needs are taken seriously. He does not minimize our fear and pain but gives His children safety and peace.

The Water of Life

The fourth window is from Revelation and a parallel passage in the Gospel of John.

“Accept the water of life as a gift.”

Revelation 22:17

“But those who drink the water that I give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give them will become in them a spring gushing up to eternal life.”

John 4:14

In life, we tend to fill ourselves with what we think will satisfy: toys, money, clothes, jewelry, work, food, alcohol, applause, the list goes on and on. But in between are empty places that only God can satisfy. Particularly in marriage, we look to one another for complete happiness

and to fulfill each other's emotional needs. This leads to disaster! May this window awaken your soul and the empty places in your life to be filled with His love for you. He embraces the depth of your need and offers the only gift that will make you whole.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life.”

John 3:16

Our lives in marriage or alone are a journey into eternal life, and He is our inexhaustible well of living water.

The Dove

In January 2001, our family was privileged to attend the inauguration of President George W. Bush in Washington D.C. It was a cold and drizzly day. Those in attendance suffered some discomfort to witness the swearing in of our 43rd President. At the end of the ceremony, I heard a voice in the crowd of 350,000 exclaim, “Look at the

dove!” From my seat, I turned around and my eyes beheld a most beautiful picture of a flock of white doves encircling an area behind me. When they had their bearings, each took flight in a different direction. I learned this was a Roman custom used to symbolize a peaceful transition from one leader to the next. The United States, unlike many countries, experiences a peaceful change in leadership. The entire process of releasing the doves until they took flight took only a matter of seconds.

I thought at the time of the carved stone dove in our chapel. We had actually chosen a dove to symbolize only peace and carved it from a picture Sharin Smith had found while we were deliberating over the formation of its wings. But as I watched the white doves encircle their familiar perspective before they took flight into the unknown that day, I thought about how the ceremony of marriage was a transition from one life to another. It was a transition from being one to being two; a transition which would require letting go of the past to grab hold of the future. It is a journey into a new life of wholeness and perfection that, like the dove, changes our course in a

matter of seconds. Therefore, this dove symbolizes a peaceful transition.

This chapel is a timeless tribute to the institution of marriage. God institutes marriage so that we could comprehend a greater relationship. Whether male or female, we are the brides of Christ. Our heavenly union with Him enables us to go to the wilderness and to exult from the mountaintop that through Him and with Him we are free to experience His precious love for us. In our marriage, Steve and I have been on the battlefield many times to plead with God to save our marriage; our marriage truly is nothing more than a gift of God's grace surrounded by love, so much love, for each other. Satan has tried many a scheme to destroy what is so sacred in God's sight. I am forever grateful that God allowed our struggles to be used to give Him glory.

Who would have ever thought that when Steve and the children gave me church membership for my birthday gift in 1986, that one day we would be building a wedding chapel? I am enveloped by a quiet awe because

I know God knew!

*“I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices
in my God. For He has clothed me with
garments of salvation and arrayed me in a
robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns
his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns
herself with her jewels.”*

Isaiah 61:10

To His Purposes,

Sarah Smith

Sarah Smith

In Memoriam

Sammy Campise

We mourn the loss of Sammy Campise, our project superintendent with Faulkner Construction Company. Sammy passed away during the construction of the Smith Family Chapel. Our thoughts and prayers are with Sammy's family. And in no small way did he share the vision of our dream for the Smith Family Chapel.

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The Smith Family
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