

Faith Story – Sandi Allen

When Pastor Bob first asked me to do this it was Blossom Day down town while I was in line waiting with the Orchard of Hope Foundations parade entry and he was tooling around on his bicycle. I immediately said sure, but after sitting here listening to some of the stories that have been presented I thought my story is not that remarkable or interesting, however, it is my story and I will share it with you.

I have had many moments in my life that I call God's nudges. Webster's Dictionary defines a nudge as: to push gently, especially with the elbow, in order to get attention.

I was raised in the Catholic faith and my parents did all the proper things like Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation. When I think about that church experience I can truthfully say I never really connected with my faith. I always felt like I was in a theatre watching a drama unfold week after week.

When I got married I left the church and it wasn't until 3 children later and just a small bit of pressure from my parents that I thought about having my girls baptized. I think the first of my God's nudges came then, because we happened to be living next door to a VFW building that was housing the congregation of a Lutheran Church while they were building a new one, and he sort of nudged us through the door that Sunday morning and I can say it was a wonderful fit. It felt right and good. There was a lot of the old traditional service I had been raised with, but a wonderful sense of faith, family and community and most of all acceptances.

Many years later our travels brought us to Canon City and I experienced another of God's nudges. The first person I met the day we arrived in town was Lyle Woltemath, and a little while later Gini. Imagine my delight when I discovered they were Lutheran. St. Paul's was a small and friendly congregation and it didn't take us long to get established in the church where we met so many wonderful people. It was during this time however that I was divorced, and that was a pretty dark period of my life. Pastor Grumm from St. Paul's did a lot of counseling with me, and helped me understand that so many times life just takes these turns that we don't anticipate and we can't prepare for, but just happen. That no matter how bad and horrible it is at the time, God is there beside us and will walk with us every day and help us heal.

Sadly though during this time I absolutely stopped going to church. I cannot explain why and have thought about it many times. I don't know if it was embarrassment, afraid of not being accepted as a single parent. Only God knows

and he hasn't seen fit to share that with me yet. In spite of not going to church I did not lose my faith. It was there as strong as ever.

Not too long after my divorce this wonderful man (lovingly referred to by Pastor Bob as the wild Baptist) came into my life. God nudged me big time into his life. Bud has taught me so much about living my Christian Faith in his openness and acceptance of our many blessings. He has taught me generous giving, not just monetary but giving of myself and my time to help family and friends. He is a wonderful father, grandfather and mentor to our grandchildren as well as teaching them the values that he was raised with.

Some 15 years have gone by now and still I had not gone back to church, but my faith was still there and about to be tested big time. I had gone for my usual annual physical the first part of January, 1997, and of course the dreaded mammogram. The first call came about mid-January when the dr.'s office said we found something suspicious and we have scheduled you for a biopsy. I did that, and on my birthday (January 26) came the call from Dr. Mohr! You need to come in and bring Bud. Heart stopping? Absolutely! Terrified? Absolutely! Scared? Overwhelmingly! I am sure when we went into the dr.'s office I had the deer in the headlights look. I remember him showing me the biopsy report. Non-invasive ductal carcinoma! BREAST CANCER! After that everything went blank and I didn't even hear the rest. I was planning my funeral already and wondering how my girls were going to handle the loss of their mother. Of course what I didn't hear him say was that because it was non-invasive it had stayed right there in that duct and not spread and that after another surgery to get cleaner margins I would only have to have radiation, and that my survival rate was 98%. I learned that later after we got home, as Bud had heard all that.

I remember much later that night sitting on the hearth and praying to God that my life was now in his hands and that I would totally and completely trust him to get me through this. I kept praying thy will be done, and do with my life what you will. If I am to survive then let there be a reason and purpose for this, and if it is my time, then so be it. I had a wonderful sense of peace after that and I knew everything would be okay.

I had 37 radiation treatments and of all the Oncologists at the Cancer Center I believe God nudged me to Dr. Ohlson because he turned out to be the most wonderful man and friend. He talked to me a lot about my faith and relying on it, and looking for a way to turn this experience into something positive in order to help others going through this that don't have the strong faith and family that I did.

Bud and I would visit a lot on my trips to radiation and we often wondered how people could afford all the gas and extra expenses involved in cancer diagnosis

and treatment. While insurance pays for most care and prescriptions, it is still those unexpected things you can't budget for like the gas, or just a meal eaten out or a set of tires that can get you. We were so blessed that it was not a hardship on us, but sitting in the waiting room waiting for your turn to get zapped, you could hear it in the voices of the other patients some times. I believe that you cannot heal physically or emotionally from cancer if you have the added burden of financial worries.

It is now 2001 and I had just retired from Canon National Bank. Six of us (2 other couples) were sitting in the Belvedere one evening chatting and we were kicking around the idea of forming a non-profit to raise money for cancer patients. None of us had any experience whatsoever in non-profits or what it even involved to get the IRS status. At the next table was a gentleman who said I wasn't eavesdropping but I did hear you talk about the non-profit and I can tell you it is extremely difficult, and you will be lucky if you get it the first time you apply for it, sometimes it can take two to three years. However, he said, since I have done it before, for a fee I would be glad to do the paperwork for you. Well, we thought about it for about 1 minute and said thanks but no thanks I think we will try to tackle it on our own, and then if we need help we will call you. I was fortunate enough to borrow an application for an existing non-profit and download the IRS form and filled it out and we sent it in March, 2001. Well, I think God's nudges were going overtime somewhere because on June 1, we received our non-profit status. Not one single thing was wrong with the application, it was not conditional it was ours for as long as we continue to operate. Most people we talk to are stunned at what happened. But I have said from day one, this is God driven. This was the birth of the Orchard of Hope Foundation and after 12 years we are still as strong as ever. We have been able to distribute over \$825,000.00 back in to this community to assist all Fremont County cancer patients and their families. We have had some good years and some not so good years with our fundraising like this year due to our slow economy, but God provides for us and we have not had to turn down one single applicant for funding. This is my absolute heart and passion. This is how I serve the Lord. Every day when I talk to cancer patients somehow God puts the right words in my mouth to give them faith, comfort and inspiration. We have laughed together and cried together but always rejoicing in the knowledge that we are not alone with this struggle. God meant for me to take my experience and turn it into something meaningful. We are lucky in our lives if we find one thing to be passionate about and I have three. Serving the Lord, my family and helping cancer patients.

There is a wonderful support group for women and through this I was able to meet Bobbie Anderson and I believe God was nudging me again, because we became wonderful friends and I adore her. One night at a meeting right here at

Shepherd of the Hills, I mentioned to her we were thinking about moving into town and she said I happen to know the house right there on the corner of Sheridan and Woodlawn is going to be for sale soon. We were able to make contact with the lady, sell our house, buy this one and the whole transaction was handled in about 5 months and I believe God again had nudged me this much closer to church.

The final nudge came about a year after we had moved in and I was in City Market one day and I don't even know if she would remember it but I ran into Karen Hart who was one of my old friends from St. Paul's. When we stopped to say hi, all the old wonderful memories of worship service, of communion, of the friendship and love of a faith congregation came back and overwhelmed me. I remember asking her what time church was, and by gosh the next Sunday morning there I was outside the door, and not only did God nudge me, I got that elbow in the back and that gentle shove through those doors and into a new world for me. Every person I have met and every service I attend renews and strengthens my faith. It is my other home, my other family and my salvation.

In recent years I have experienced three deaths of family members in three years. My mother, father, and sister who died in a tragic plane wreck, as well as a very ill husband. My faith allowed me to meet the storm, walk through it and come out on the other side with an even deeper and abiding faith.

I would like to end with a bible verse that has served me well in many phases of my life.

PHILIPPIANS 4 :13

I CAN DO EVERYTHING THROUGH HIM WHO GIVES ME STRENGTH.