

# My Faith Journey

Vonda Craig

My story tells how fortunate I am – or how the Lord blessed me from the very beginning - when at 6 months of age a man by the name of Mr. Zerwick made a phone call to my parents – and why was Mr. Zerwick important? He was important because he was the Superintendent of The Iowa Soldier's Orphan's Home and met my mother when she and my aunt traveled there from a farm south of Shenandoah, IA to Davenport, IA - a long story that means only that it was an auspicious beginning to my journey. A few days after that accidental meeting with him he called to let them know that he had seen the love and longing in mother's eyes, and he had a baby girl for them – and was sending the baby – on the train - in the care of his wife and my mother's cousin, and she would be there in about 3 hours! Once she and Dad got over the shock, she began tearing up flannel sheets to make diapers, she said!

That was the first of many blessings in my life. My parents had been married for 18 years, had longed for children, but it was not to be – they cared for numerous nieces and nephews, her sisters, and stray relatives for short and long periods of time. And they loved them all, me included. We were farmers - I went to a country church, a country school, and all in all, had a great childhood, though it was during the Depression but we, like most of our neighbors and relatives, worked our way through it.

A snag in my life happened at age 6, when I had a ruptured appendix, which, in those times of no antibiotics, no IVs, and rudimentary medical care, could be critical. I was in the hospital nearly a month – it took my parents several years to pay off the bill. I found out later that the members of Locust Grove M.E. Church had offered many prayers for my recovery. That was the second big blessing.

Everything was fine from then on – I graduated from school, went to college and became a country school teacher – which I loved.- and loved those children - in fact, one of my first kindergarten students, now a man over 65 years old, contacted me a few years ago, and he and his wife stopped in to visit while they were touring the Gorge. It was wonderful to see them. I told him he still looked like Ronnie, though a little taller and rounder,(and he added) - and with less hair!"

Lavelle and I married in that little country church in 1949, and he and a friend started an appliance business that was in competition with the local poohbah of the draft board. Not surprisingly, since they, Davis and Craig, were becoming successful, they both got their draft notices the same day! He went to the Air Force and Bob Davis went to the Army.

We were soon ready to start a family, and were thrilled to find that we were expecting a baby on February 14, 1954. We wanted a little boy – we prayed and prayed for a son. However, after spending some time on bed rest, and time in the hospital, I miscarried. I was so angry with God. I railed against Him, asking what could we possibly have done that was so bad that we would be denied this child, and on and on I carried this anger within me. Why me, Lord? Why us?

But after a few years we decided to apply to adopt a child, and filled out the paper work. Oh good grief, we had all the inspections, all the family and friends contacts, and on and on – even to measuring the room that would be the baby's! But ok, we did it, and it looked like God might smile on us when we finally got the word that hey, there was a little BOY that could be ours! We were in Iowa then, and made the drive back to Davenport to the same orphanage; only the name had changed to the Iowa Annie Wittenmeyer Home by then.

Our information was that this little boy was 3-1/2 years old, wore glasses, and needed surgery to correct his vision – that didn't matter, and we were so thrilled – then we were taken to his “cottage” – an old building with a long high staircase. Our first glimpse of our new son was of a little boy with a skinned nose, a bad haircut, glasses taped across the nose piece, and a sweet shy grin, coming down the stairway to us. Oh, he was beautiful! He was perfect! I picked him up at that moment, and from then on he was our Richard Lavelle, our Ricky.

I tell him I fell in love with him the first day we saw him and have never felt any need to change our minds. And you know what? His birthday is February 17, 1954! The Lord didn't turn his face to us! I turned my face away from Him, and He had this precious little boy planned just for us! And what a blessing he was, and has been! Because of him I could celebrate Mother's Day for the first time! And that made the third blessing.

Time went on and we moved – and moved – and moved, as Lavelle was transferred frequently in his position with a finance company. We moved

here to Canon in 1959, and we very much wanted a little girl – so made application to adopt again. Since our son was fine and we passed all their requests, one morning we got a phone call saying there was a baby girl available to be ours! Oh what joy! We made a trip to Littleton on a sparkling sunny morning in September, 1959, and took our little box of baby clothes, and a name with us, and walked into the office, and visited briefly with the Social Worker, who then took us into a lovely sunny room and in the middle was a crib – and in the crib was a beautiful little 5-month old baby girl in a pink sleeper too small for her – who turned to look at us, and grinned – and there were 2 little teeth shining there! We all but melted! Rick held her first and told her her name, and then we took turns – checked fingers and toes and that little kewpie curl on the top of her head – adorable! Took that little pink outfit off of her and put on the clothes we brought, and took her home, stopping once at a restaurant to warm a bottle! We had our little Valarie Lenn. And that made the fourth blessing.

Another move, to Phoenix, then to Prairie Village, Kansas, where I had minor surgery that lead to a massive infection, peritonitis. I was in the hospital for a month. Neighbors and church friends were wonderful to help with the children, and my mother took Valarie home with her, as she could not stay any longer, but needed to get back to Dad and the farm.

That illness was a major attitude adjustment for me. I was so full of infection and they kept trying different antibiotics to see what would help - most did not. One evening I was so sick that even breathing was an effort. I felt myself going very quickly through a gray tunnel, but the pain was gone. After whooshing through the tunnel, there was a light, but there was a curtain, a veil of some sort, and I couldn't see anything but felt beauty similar to the 23rd Psalm. I saw no one, I heard nothing, but there was a wonderful peaceful feeling of love. I felt that I had only to open that curtain and I could join that. Then the thought came to me that how could Lavelle raise these two little children? My parents had just celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and how it would hurt them if I died then – and for some reason, (The Lord's plan, obviously), I was able to come back. It was like pulling back inch by inch – so slowly - and the pull was to go on to the peace and love - but I didn't. And I came back to more pain, and more hospital time, but I was back. Recovery was long, but I got to stay, and that was wonderful. That made the fifth blessing.

Years later on one snowy day when Rick was on his way home from college for the weekend, bringing a friend with him, an accident happened

when the road ahead was suddenly was blocked with snow. The car flipped on it's top, and they skidded quite a distance. Rick was pinned under the top, but the friend, who became his best man when he and Janel were married, was not seriously injured. The patrolman came to our door and advised us that our son was in the hospital and seriously injured. The bottom line to that was that he was scalped - yes - and he also lost a finger. After the surgery the doctor came to us and said that he had a severe head injury and it was possible he could "be a vegetable" after he awoke. He later had more surgeries to pull together what skin was left on his scalp and he still has a large scar. After the second surgery, his facial skin was so tight he said he could hardly close his eyes, and I told him that the dimple in his chin used to be his belly button. Well, again our Lord came to us and he awoke alert and capable, and after all that, he completed his Master's and became a teacher at Western State in Gunnison, and was not a carrot, after all. And for the sixth time, the Lord was with us.

I met my birth parents in the 1970's. Had the Lord not been with me from the beginning, my life would have been entirely different, as the biological father had been in prison, a convicted pedophile. I found my birth sister – and in time we became very close, though she had not known I existed until then, and it was definitely a surprise! Medical information was helpful, as the grandmother, mother, and then the sister, all succumbed to various cancers. They have all passed away now, as have my dear parents – my dad, a down-to-earth kind and gentle man who loved the Lord, his wife and his daughter, maybe in that order, and my mom, who was lively and funny, athletic and with a joyful spirit, who made everyone around her feel better just for knowing her, and my beloved husband, whose last words to me were “I love you” as were mine to him.

Now because of the Lord's many blessings, because He took me from the orphanage and because He gave me parents who loved each other and who loved me, who never raised their hands (really) and voices (well, maybe a little) to me, who were kind and thoughtful and fun and funny and showed me what a Godly life could be, I am so blessed. What more could I have asked? Lavelle and I had 59 happy (well, mostly) years of marriage. I have two fine and loving children, four grand children, one of whom now waits for me in Heaven, and two great grandchildren who make my life complete.

Yes, Lord, you have certainly strengthened my faith throughout my journey, as you have walked with me and cared for me and lifted me up when I needed you. You have given me my dearly loved family and friends all along the way, which have been one of the biggest blessings of all. Thank you, Father, for showing me your love.