

**December 2019**

**God is the Master of Redeeming & Restoring  
What Should Have Been Condemned!**



Andrew & Elise, Matt & Amanda, Logan & Alex, Sue, Addison & Liam, Sarah & Aaron, John

**Celebrating Thanksgiving with our family in our new kitchen/dining area!**



Liam, Andrew, Alex, Logan, Aaron, Sarah, Addison, Sue, John, Amanda, Matt, Elise

On August 26, 2018, we moved into a house we purchased after renting for seven years. On December 12, 2018, we evacuated the house under Doctor's orders because of the autoimmune disease Sue contracted that was triggered by the horrendous mouse infestation in our house. After 49 weeks of living in temporary housing and with friends, we moved back into our house on November 18, 2019.

During this season of Advent, Sue and I are moved to share with you another part of our story.

## Discerning, hearing, and following the voice of Jesus — while living through a traumatic experience.

Jesus says, *I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.* (John 10:14 & 27 NIV)

Sue and I were traumatized by the mouse infestation we discovered in our house! It was the worst mouse infestation professionals have ever seen. We didn't know what to do.



It was traumatic for us to hear Dr. Garibaldi tell Sue that she has an autoimmune disease called Polymyalgia Rheumatica "PMR." It was traumatic to evacuate our house under doctor's orders.

In the early weeks and months after we evacuated our house, I heard Sue say several times, "I didn't realize how sick I really was." It was difficult for Sue to function or think clearly. She needed time to rest, sleep, and be in a tranquil and peaceful environment. Our first month in the cottage on Murray Lake, and the following two months at the Two Fish Bungalow, provided by Calvary Church, were a gift from God!

We were frightened, traumatized sheep. We are forever grateful for our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ! He faithfully sent people to us with the wisdom, expertise, and advice we needed at just the right time to take the next step on our journey.

### What do we do with a house that should have been condemned?

- We poured out our hearts to Jesus and asked Him to lead us.
- We sought and received advice from family, friends, and various professionals.
- I gave Sue as much time as she needed to decide if she wanted to return to the house after it was cleaned and restored, or if she wanted to sell it and find something else.

One morning in February, Sue woke up with an idea about how to make the decision regarding the house. After work, she met with her counselor to share the idea with her. Her counselor thought it was a brilliant idea and fully supported it. Sue's idea was separating the house from the people who sold it to us. She was still angry with the previous owners for what they did to her. But the house itself didn't do anything wrong. The house was the victim of abuse and neglect. Sue believed God was leading us not to run, but to return to that house.

I sent out an email update to our mailing list, thanking everyone for their prayers and support and letting people know Sue had decided to return to the house after it was completely cleaned and restored.

On Wednesday, February 13, I called a friend who left me a message the night before to call him. He said, "I am so glad you called. I have been aching for you in this situation. A lot of people have been

receiving the email and they are very concerned. People feel so terrible for Sue. A group of people are wondering why you are going back into that house? Why go back in?"

I explained that I let Sue decide, with as much time as she needed, and without any influence from me.

"Why let her choose?" he asked. "It feels in my heart that to honor Sue would be to keep her 100% out of the house and not take the risk of ever returning. Find a way to move into a brand new apartment or condo to honor and protect her." He said he felt the Lord wanted Him to say to me, "Please consider taking Sue out of this situation."

I told our friend I would receive his message from the Lord for us. I thanked him for loving us enough to share what God laid on his heart to share with me."

After that phone conversation, I wrote several pages in my prayer journal. I even did a Google search for condos for sale in Grand Rapids. I quickly found one that I thought Sue would like.

Then I followed a prompt from the Holy Spirit to call our daughter Sarah. I asked, "Do you think it would be helpful to Mommy if I made the decision about what to do with the Burlingame house for her?" Sarah immediately responded, "Absolutely not! You are in this together and you need to make this decision together!" That was exactly what I needed to hear. I heard the voice of Jesus through Sarah.

Wednesday evening Sue and I spent several hours talking about our house and whether or not we should move back into it. I told her about the message from the Lord that our friend shared with me.

Sue shared how much it meant to her that our friend was willing to take the risk of telling me what God laid on his heart for us. Sue was very grateful that we were revisiting the conversation about whether or not to move back into our house.

On Friday Sue had lunch with her brother and sister-in-law. Sue asked them what they would think if we sold the Burlingame house. They both said they would understand completely. Her brother said, don't give it away, but if you can sell it for close to what you paid for it, then sell it. Sue said that conversation was very helpful to her because she didn't want anyone to think that she is a quitter.

Sue said, "We need to sell the Burlingame house. A house is very important to a woman and I don't like that house." I said, "OK. I will start making arrangements tomorrow to sell the house."

Saturday morning I called the realtor and made arrangements for him to stop by at 2:00. I met a friend at the Burlingame house and we used his pickup truck to pick up building supplies at the lumber company for rebuilding our basement.

Around noon, one of Sue's closest friends came to the Burlingame house because she knew Sue was going to stop by. They talked in the kitchen for a while and then Sue gave her a tour. Our friend really liked the house and made several positive comments about it.

When I came up from the basement to get something, they were talking in the kitchen. While I was standing there, Sue's close friend said, "Absolutely do not sell this house. This is the house God chose for you. This house is your blessing from God. Do not turn your back on God's blessing or His gift to you. Yes you went through some bad things here, but that is in the past. Don't speak that into the atmosphere. Satan is trying to steal your blessing. Don't let him into this house. And don't let a realtor into this house. They would love to help you sell it because they know they can. But then you will wake up and realize that you made a huge mistake. You went from renting many years to now owning this house. Don't throw that away. This is the place where God wants to bless you. Do not sell this house."



Sue asked her if she was certain that this message was from the Lord. She replied, "Absolutely. I am totally confident this is what God is telling me to say to you. I have no reservation and no doubt about this. God wants you to stay in this house and prove that you are an overcomer. This house is structurally sound. It has no major issues. Everything that is wrong or doesn't work right can be fixed and repaired."

"You have not felt well and the colors in this house have not helped you. This is the worst shade of gray I have ever seen. I know grey and white are the popular colors now, but there isn't any shade of grey that is joyful and happy. God wants you to experience JOY in this house. Not simply Jesus first, others second, and yourself third. God wants you to experience real JOY here. You need to put JOY signs everywhere around this house. Paint the walls another color. Paint the cabinets another color. Tear out the floor and replace it with something lighter and brighter. It will change the look and feel of this house."

Then she said, "God usually tells me to remain silent. But not this time. God told me to speak the truth into your life. Do not sell this house. You will regret it. God has you in this house for a reason and a purpose. He wants to fill your house and your life with joy."

We both gave her a big hug and thanked her for loving us enough to speak the truth so strongly and forcefully. We believe Jesus used our friend to help us hear His voice.

In the course of a few days, we received two very different messages, from two friends we trust, who were both convinced they were sharing a message they received from the Lord for us. The two messages we received seemed to be conflicting and contradictory. One said leave, the other said stay. I asked Sue what she wanted to do. Sue replied, "I believe God wants us to stay in this house." I called the realtor and told him we changed our mind and we decided not to sell the house. He was very kind, gracious, and supportive of our decision to keep the house.

## **Was one friend right and the other friend wrong?**

No. Both messages were from the Lord. Jesus knew we needed to hear both of those messages and he chose wisely for the two people to deliver those messages to us. It seemed confusing at first because they came in reverse order from when we needed to apply them. We are learning to wait on the Lord.

The second message challenged us to trust Him enough to move back into our house. His desire was to use our situation with a mouse infested house as an opportunity to demonstrate His ability to redeem, clean, and restore something that should have been condemned. In Christ we are overcomers!

The first message planted a question deep in my heart — how can I risk bringing Sue back into that house if there is any possibility of exposure that could affect her health? Several professionals examined our house and they were convinced there was no need to remove the kitchen cabinets or walls. I had to be one hundred percent sure with zero margin of error. On March 16, I made the decision to trust Forrest Cousino and Jim Strobridge. Removing the onsite stick built kitchen cabinets and drywall was the only way I could be confident everything from the mouse infestation had been removed from the house.



We uncovered huge mouse nests under every one of the kitchen base cabinets. We also exposed a large mouse nest in the wall above the door to our bathroom/laundry room. We dropped the entire kitchen ceiling and sorted through all the insulation from the attic with no evidence of mouse activity!

## Our house has been redeemed, cleaned, and transformed!

Sue and I feel the love, joy, peace, and presence of God in this house. God said He would transform it for us and He did! Our prayer is for every person who enters this house to have a personal encounter with the living Jesus Christ, who knows them personally and loves them dearly. We are dedicating our house to the Lord for His Kingdom purposes. To God be the Glory! Great things He has done!

**Our hopes and dreams for our new kitchen becoming the hub of our home are coming true!**



## LIFE'S JOURNEY

As I traveled up the mountainside I longed to take the wide green grassy road.  
I want a life without troubles, I never prepared for a heavy load.  
The softness of the dew kissed moss felt like velvet stroking my bare toes.  
This path seemed gentle and easy and void of hurt or painful woes.  
But a rope was put around my waist I was lifted high above,  
up the rocky side of the mountain, a place no one would chose or love.  
I fought and cried in terror for the rope to leave me be.  
I wanted to remain right there where the direction I could clearly see.  
But the person on the other end kept a steady grip upon that line.  
I simmered down and agreed to walk the hard and steep incline.  
I stumbled and I fell a lot, I almost could not cope.  
I felt sorry for my burden and shook my fist at that long rope.  
I wished I had not given in to accept this long hard climb.  
I never felt so tired or needed more resting time.  
Yet then I reached a place where I could clearly see.  
I was traveling up to the highest peak and the sun was shining on me.  
I looked down upon where I had trod and realized that carrying that load  
had saved me from a wretched fall at the end of the wide green grassy road.

For that easy path led to a deep ravine that would surely have taken me down.  
 And the view from the glorious mountaintop was better than any crown.  
 In my life's long journey I usually seek the easy ways.  
 God knows the rocks I need to climb to prepare me for the end of my days.  
 This does not make it easy. This does not ease my pain.  
 But it helps to know he's walked this way so I'll try to not complain.  
 I will hold tight to the rope of my salvation and continue as he leads  
 I will trust the Creator of all that is to meet every one of my needs.  
 ~~~Laura DeWeerd

**Update on Sue's Health:** Sue stopped taking prednisone in September, four months ahead of schedule. She was not cured, but she hated the side effects! Sue discovered that prednisone doesn't heal her Polymyalgia Rheumatica "PMR". It simply masks the pain and makes it more tolerable. When asked how she is doing, Sue has learned to say, "The journey continues." She still has pain in the joints of her shoulders and hips. A restful night's sleep is still a challenge because her arms and hands continue to go to sleep. Sue is taking another path now with functional medicine and she is hopeful for a positive outcome over time.

**PastorCare WM 2019 Ministry Summary:** Pastor John & Sue attended worship services at 28 churches to connect with and encourage the pastor. Pastor John facilitated 12 sessions of a REAL CARE group for pastors, and he provided pulpit supply three Sundays. The PastorCare ministry team hosted two events for pastors and church leaders. Here are some statistics of the people Pastor John connected with, coached, and served this year.

**PastorCare WM Ministry 1/1/2019 — 12/5/2019**

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| Pastors                | 67 |
| Pastor's Spouses       | 8  |
| Pastor's Sons          | 4  |
| Pastor's Daughters     | 0  |
| Missionaries           | 5  |
| Church Leaders         | 14 |
| Denominational Leaders | 3  |
| Seminary Leaders       | 2  |
| Non-Profit Leaders     | 11 |
| Care Givers            | 3  |
| Counselors             | 2  |
| Sheep                  | 12 |

**Please consider making a generous year end gift to PastorCare West Michigan.**



**Pastor John and Sue Smith enjoying their brief visit to the Great South Bay, Sayville, Long Island, NY, August 3, 2019.**

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**Thank you for your prayers and financial support!**

Please make checks payable to: PastorCare West Michigan  
 8056 Burlingame Ave. SW Bryon Center, MI 49315.

You may also donate using PayPal through our website:  
[www.pastorcarewm.org](http://www.pastorcarewm.org)

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