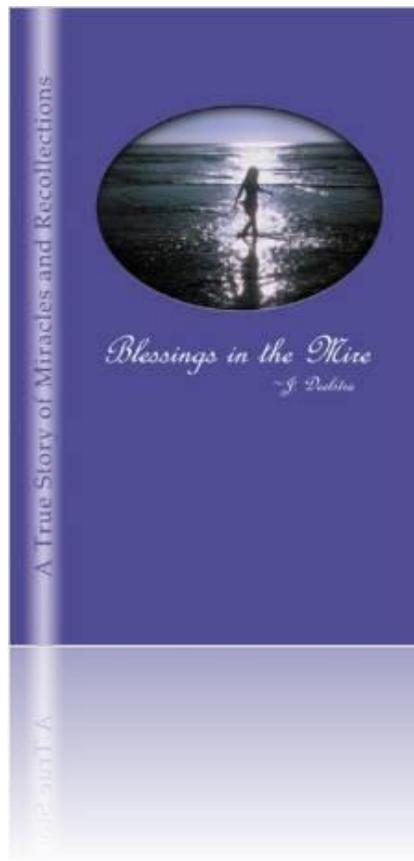


Excerpt:



***BLESSINGS IN THE MIRE:
A TRUE STORY OF MIRACLES &
RECOLLECTIONS***

Excerpt from *Blessings in the Mire* by Jan Deelstra

The too early, unwelcome telephone ringing was intercepted by the answering machine, "...a shooting...Ryan." The sentence swirled around the room and evaporated up the staircase as I came down. It stormed past me. This whirlwind easily eluded my mental grasp. My sleepy brain refused to comprehend the verbal assault.

The phone rang again as I continued to descend. "There's been a shooting. It's Ryan..." a new voice spoke to the machine. This time the words hung in the air like dirty laundry. Picking up the phone, I heard nonsense, incomprehensible noise, words with no form or definition attached to them. I hung up on the crank call. Another blaring ring entered the competition to distress me. "Mrs. Kraft, this is Jessica, Clinton's girlfriend." She paused, taking a series of shallow breaths. "Kraft.... Sorry ...sorry.... There's been a shooting.... I'm sorry. There's been a shooting. Ryan has been shot."

A trillion speeding emotions slammed into my gut, fireworks of terror exploded through my nerve endings. "No!" the primal moan roared from the deepest roots of motherhood. Caving in around the savage cruelty of the attack words, my body doubled over with the psychic gut punch. The sentence blasted the breath and light from me. The crude, barbarous utterance threatened to solidify in my reeling mind. Like an angry Mother-Earth my repulsed body quaked in an effort to shake and repel the vicious lie. Pounding tidal waves of hell rolled over me drowning any physical, and common senses. Uncontrollable spastic shivering then took over. My guts fluttered hollowly, threatening upheaval. "No!" denial shot back once again at the innocent messenger. "Is he dead?" I heard my quivering voice ask.

"I don't know," the teary, brave messenger said. "Clinton has gone over to see. I'll call you when he gets back. I'm so sorry."

As damaged road kill removing itself from asphalt into the brush to die, I dragged myself back to the staircase. A dazed and wounded animal, I moved slothfully, dreading my unbearable mission. Weakly, I pulled myself up, inching forward, step-by-step, upward, to wake my peacefully sleeping daughter. Brutally, but innocently, I would inflict more pain on her than she should ever have to endure in an entire lifetime, wreaking more pain than I should ever have been required to inflict. My words would be weapons to her young sibling heart, "Your brother's been shot."

A stunned pilot navigating through a veil of thick air, instinctively, I dialed the emergency numbers "9-1-1," semi-conscious that it was all just a wicked mistake. Vaguely, I now recall a wisp of a thought that I had at that moment, that moment of unreal time. The wisp was of a prior late night prank call meant to upset my daughter. Her friend phoned with news of a boyfriend's accident; it had turned out to be misinformation. I reassured myself with the memory of that past, caustic, teasing misinformation. This call too must surely be a twisted hoax, or a vile mistaken identity. Someone else would be grieving over *their* losses, not me! Now my daughter stands near me, listening....

"I heard there's been a shooting. Can you tell me if it's true?" I was only somewhat shaky now, as I heard myself ask the absurd question of the woman on the line. The emergency operator verified my identity and said an officer would call me back within the next fifteen minutes.

Almost immediately a detective rang back. "Mrs. Kraft," the faceless voice on the phone began, "I'm sorry. It is your son. He is dead. *Please* don't come here. It's *mayhem*. All of his friends are here. They are screaming and fighting. It's out of control. Please, Mrs. Kraft. I know this is difficult, but please don't come here. You don't want to see him like this! Where would you like us to take *the body*? Is he a donor?"

He just became one.

Someone in my body provided the officer with instructions, as the other casualties slid down the wall, ripples of effect collapsing into a pool of life's war.

Together, we waited. Separate in our individual emotion, but now forever entwined in grief, Melodie and I waited in salt-water tears and empty silence for her father to come by to drive us over to see her oldest brother, Jason. Together, we waited to inflict more pain on Jason than he should ever have to endure.

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