

TALES
OF THE ONES
HE WON'T LET
GO

BETH GUCKENBERGER

WARNING: THESE STORIES MAY CHANGE THE WAY YOU SEE THE WORLD

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Storyweaver Series by Beth Guckenberger

Tales of the Not Forgotten

Tales of the Not Forgotten Leader's Guide

Tales of the Defended Ones

Tales of the Defended Ones Leader's Guide

Tales of the Ones Led Out

Tales of the Ones Led Out Leader's Guide

Tales of the Ones He Won't Let Go

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Relentless Hope

Reckless Faith

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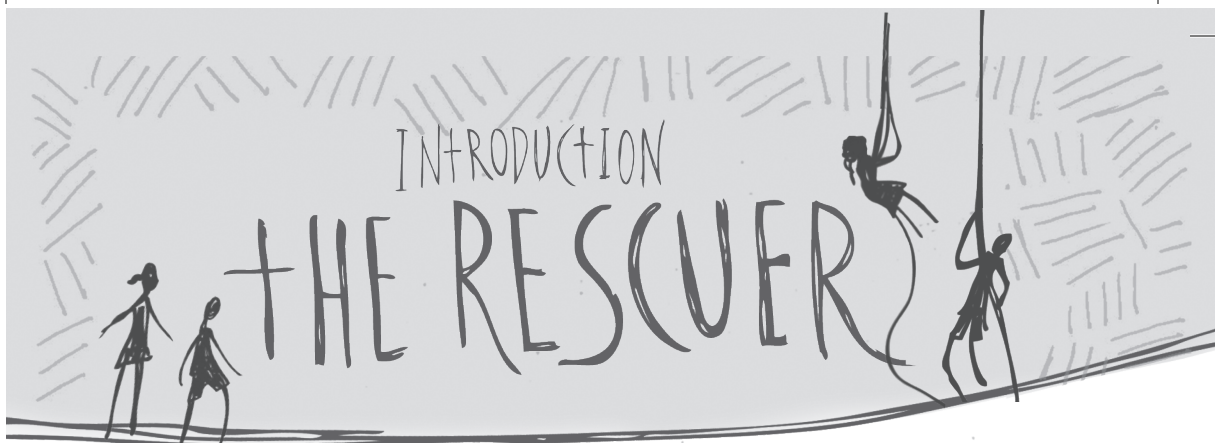
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ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

*To Marilyn and Marlene,
you have been my favorite faith lesson,
my oldest children, and my total joy.
What a privilege to be your Mama.*






But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted.

—Psalm 10:14



They tell me things were different back then. They must be right. When I was a kid we put a ladder at the end of our diving board and jumped off. Somehow there were no stitches. We also had a tandem bike—I would ride on the handlebars, my dad would steer in the front seat, and my brother would ride behind my dad in the second seat. Then eventually my baby brother sat in the baby seat attached over the back tire. Three kids, one dad—no helmets? For hours each summer, we were this merry family, riding around the neighborhood. And somehow, no one ended up in the hospital.

I suppose that's where my first faith lessons started for me, on that bike. In the beginning, it was on the handlebars, where I would wiggle and dance just to make my dad nervous as he exerted his strength to



keep us upright. Then I moved behind him to the second seat. I learned to let go of the handlebars and just ride along, still pedaling, but trusting he would steer us correctly. Sometimes I would close my eyes and feel how strange it was to be barreling in a direction I couldn't see. Other times I would open my eyes and lean my body in balance as we would turn a sharp corner, my hands off the handlebars again, testing to see if I could stay on.

In those early years, I trusted my dad. Then as I grew, I transferred my trust in my earthly father to a trust in my heavenly one.

Riding a tandem bike, I've learned, is a bit like walking with Jesus.

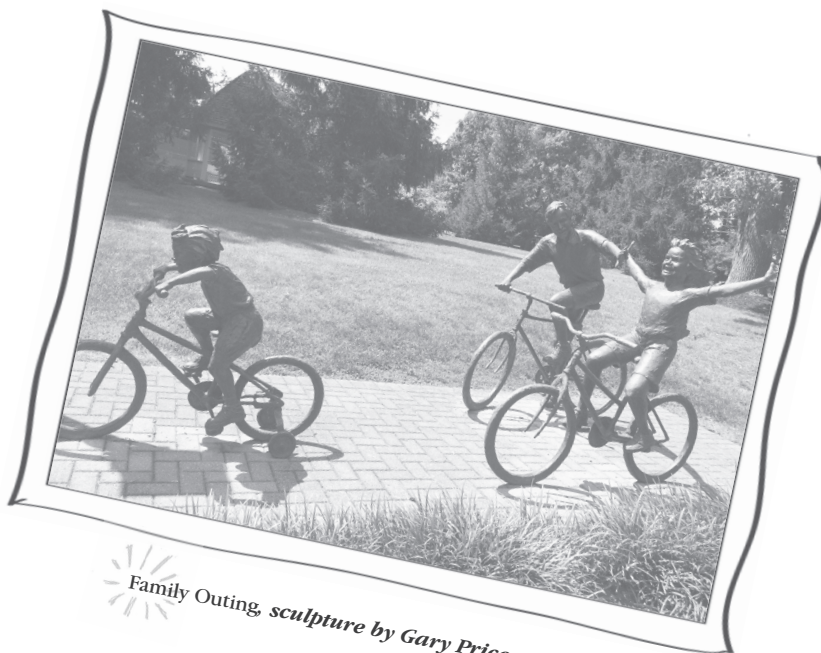
He keeps me balanced, he chooses the path, he steers, and he always keeps his eyes open (allowing me to close my own when needed).

There's a statue in my town that I love—some days I divert my normal route just so I can go past it. It's a girl on a bike, not holding on, and the look of freedom on her face gets me every time. It's the freedom that comes with confidence. It's the freedom that comes in knowing that you've learned the lessons


of balance and steering and speed, and now it's time to try it on your own—no training wheels. It's the freedom that comes with trust—knowing that even if you make a mistake, even if you fall, your Father will be there to catch you.

There will be days when, after you've learned a lot of lessons, God will ask you to get on your own bike. He'll still direct the steering so you can let go, but you can only hear those directions by listening.


Have you learned to listen to Jesus? Do you just talk to him or do you ask him to talk back? In the stories you will read in this book, there are some mighty examples of real people who asked God to



Family Outing, sculpture by Gary Price




lead them, then listened as he did. As a result, children are being rescued, families are being created, and storylines are being written that will last forever. Those are the best kind.



When I was in my twenties, my husband and I had three small children of our own and were living in Mexico, serving in several children's homes. We had fallen deeply in love with eleven-year-old twin girls, Marilyn and Marlene, and for four years we celebrated their birthdays, school victories, and their very lives. We spent weekends and holidays together and I enjoyed very much being their *tia*. Then one Sunday afternoon, a month after they turned fifteen, Todd called me from their orphanage to tell me of a





critical situation. We needed to make a quick choice: Did we want to lose the girls forever, or did we want them to come home with us that day, forever? Which forever did we want?

Well, what I wanted was to be in the front seat, driving on a path I could easily see and predict, turning and braking as I wished. But that is not how the faith life unfolds. The best stories happen when you take the second seat—when you let go and close your eyes, and trust in the driver.

I couldn't imagine much that afternoon about our path or our future or any plan. So, I sat down on the couch and asked God to talk to me. *I am listening*, I told him. As I listened, I could feel the fear subside. Once the fear stopped clouding my brain, I heard his direction. *Go. Go get them.*

Once you hear God, you have two choices, to obey or disobey. I went over to the orphanage where the girls were living and said to Todd what I knew God was steering us toward. Together, we said yes, and immediately I was the mom of twin teenage girls.


I remember the next day I went with all five of them (my three little birth children and these two

new hijas) to the pet store, and let each pick out a fish. I bought a tank and all the accessories, then brought the whole crew and our new packages home. That afternoon, I did a devotional with them all about how we might look different and be different sizes, but we were all going to share the same space. We needed to see how we were more alike than different. It was a beautiful lesson that ended with everyone hugging and committing to swim well in the same tank together.

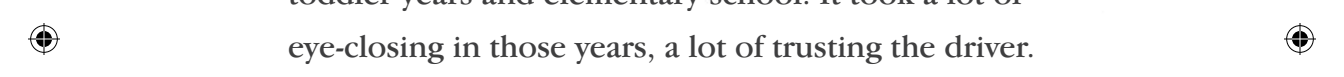
This is going to work out just fine, I thought.
That lasted about three days.



Beth with her twin daughters.




One afternoon I had just come home, and Marilyn came running out to the car to tell me Josh's fish had eaten Marlene's. There were tears. I had to confess to them that maybe my analogy didn't work in some places. But we still needed to remember the lesson! We all shared a good laugh. It was our first small piece of shared family history—our first story we would tell in the years to come.





In many ways, we all grew up together, through the girls' high school and college years and the little's toddler years and elementary school. It took a lot of eye-closing in those years, a lot of trusting the driver. It took me believing that our God the Rescuer had a story for us all. I told them all many times, that there was a cost and a benefit to our family make-up (which changed and grew significantly over the years), and they needed to focus on the benefit and not pout over the cost. That's how this would work.

That was fourteen years ago, and now no one can imagine our family any other way. God-directed paths lead to stories we tell long after the events have passed. It might be scary when you first close your eyes or let go of the handlebars, but we can always





trust our driver. He will never let us go.



I want you to learn a faith walk that isn't careful, that doesn't rely on manmade safety measures. I want you to trust Jesus with the carefree spirit of one who knows how to let go of the handlebars. Watch in these chapters for a Nigerian boy named Moses, who is curious about a God who literally lifted him from the grave. Listen for the Storyweaver, working his plan in China with two children who should have died, but instead live today happily within a family. There is a great story about a boy in Haiti who listened to God as he breathed a dream into him and now is watching that story unfold. Believe with three Mexican sisters who are learning, as ours girls did, how to accept a family who first accepted them. Then right here, in our backyard, is a story of an American teenager, who lived her whole life abused and in danger, and who God has picked up and lifted her into a new place, where a new chapter of a beautiful story is unfolding.

There are a lot of people with eternal storylines to meet in the following pages. I can't wait for you to hear their stories. May they cause you to trust in new ways and believe in a God who has never let us go.



Chapter 4

RONALDO'S FUTURE




It was just a normal Tuesday afternoon. Children were finishing their homework, waiting for their mother to get home from work. Hopefully, dinner would be coming soon.

BOOM! There was a loud crash—like thunder, but ten times louder. Then screaming—screaming from all around. It seemed like it would never end.

Where is Manman?

Furniture was tossed around. Whole walls shivered, looking as if they might crumble any second. The children who were just a minute ago doing math problems now crawled through rubble and searched through dust clouds, straining to see any figures they could recognize. *Where is Manman?* The thought echoed in their minds for the tenth time in the space of a minute. One of them stepped on the clock that used to hang on the wall, now smashed on the ground—hands stopped.

It was just before 5 p.m.



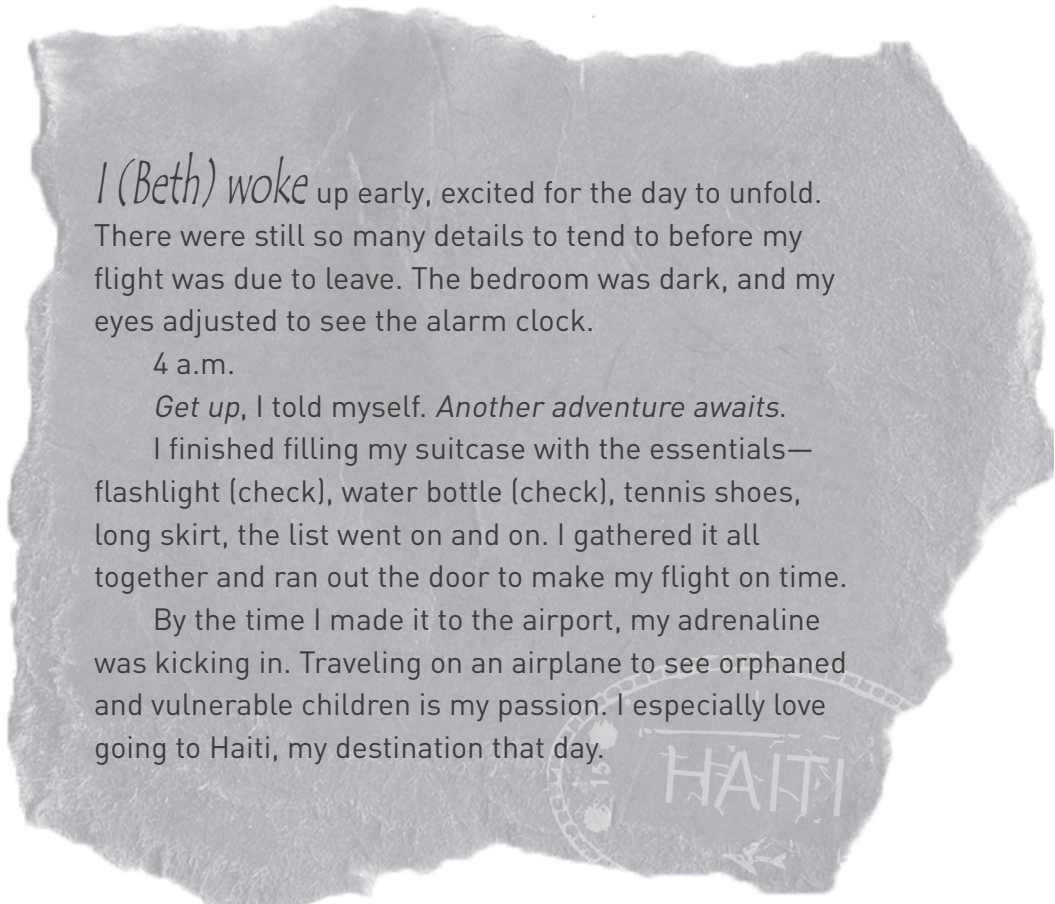
I (Beth) woke up early, excited for the day to unfold. There were still so many details to tend to before my flight was due to leave. The bedroom was dark, and my eyes adjusted to see the alarm clock.

4 a.m.

Get up, I told myself. Another adventure awaits.


I finished filling my suitcase with the essentials—flashlight (check), water bottle (check), tennis shoes, long skirt, the list went on and on. I gathered it all together and ran out the door to make my flight on time.

By the time I made it to the airport, my adrenaline was kicking in. Traveling on an airplane to see orphaned and vulnerable children is my passion. I especially love going to Haiti, my destination that day.




And still the shaking came. Wave after wave of earthquakes. The people thought it really would never end—that the ground would just keep moving until it brought them all to their knees. Until they could never move again.

When darkness fell that night, the children were scared. Scared of the dark. Scared of more shaking. Siblings gathered close together and held onto each



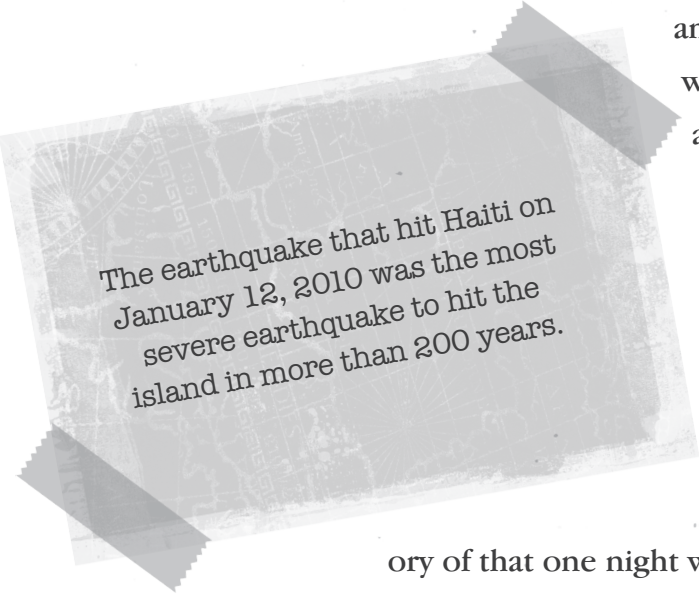
other tightly, sitting on piles of papers and rags. They wanted to get up and keep looking for their mother. But how in the world could they ever find her now? Nothing was working. No phones, no electricity. It was so black—they were frozen there in fear.

When the first light of day finally came, their eyelids fluttered open. *Get up*, a voice inside them said. *You have to get up.*



Four years later, and the children of Haiti can still hear the screaming in their minds. After the earthquake ripped through their world, destroying their towns and cities, nothing was the same. Some of their mothers and fathers who hadn't come home that night never did come home. Siblings were scattered





The earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12, 2010 was the most severe earthquake to hit the island in more than 200 years.

among relatives who couldn't really afford to take care of them. Many children ended up in children's homes, settling in with others who had this shared mem-

ory of that one night when everything changed—when the *tranbleman tè* came.

Some days were easy and others were just plain hard. And the hardest part for many was believing there was any story left for them—it took a lot of strength to hold onto hope.



POST CARD
CORRESPONDENCE

**Tranbleman tè means
“earthquake.”**



I first came to Haiti with Back2Back Ministries after the earthquake of 2010, a devastating natural disaster that, according to official estimates, took the lives of 316,000 people, injured 300,000, displaced 1.3 million, and destroyed 97,294 houses. There were lots of people serving orphans well there at the time, and we wanted to support them, to stand back to back with these ministries, offering resources where we could.

One of the first children's homes we had had the privilege to serve was the Lighthouse. The Lighthouse is a part of Jesus in Haiti Ministries, an organization begun by Tom Osbeck. Tom came to Haiti on a mission trip almost twenty years ago, and felt called to serve the children there. Within a few years, he started a youth group, which grew from only fourteen kids to five hundred! Tom and the kids with him captured my heart from day one. Since those first days, we had visited other homes and met other kids, but the faces that propelled me out of bed at 4 a.m. were still those of the Lighthouse.

Within hours, I was stepping off the plane with a small team of traveling friends and into the wet heat that is Haiti—a tiny country sharing an island with the Dominican Republic, with the Atlantic on one side and the Caribbean Sea on the other.

Climbing into the back of the tap-tap, I could hear the excited observations of the first-time guests, pointing out the women carrying baskets on their heads and the street markets filled with fruit they'd never seen. There were fields full of tent houses and motorcycles clogging the street.

It was only a two-hour flight from Miami, but it felt like we were in another world.

Ronaldo was not sure about this new home when he first came to the Lighthouse. As was true for many other kids, it felt like nothing was solid. What was certain?

He knew only a few things. He was grateful for a place for him and his brothers. And he had always loved kids. But could he trust this stranger—this white man from America? How did he get here anyway?

Before many months had passed, he began to feel like he belonged to this home, and to




This woman carries a load of possessions on her head—a typical sight in Haiti.



the collection of boys in it.

It wasn't easy all the time. There were rules to follow and everyone had chores to do. And the particular mixture of personalities in the house kept him on his toes.

On all the days he was tempted to feel sorry for himself, he would remember, at least he had his brothers. At least he wasn't hungry. There were many things he found to be thankful for. But it was hard to keep the right perspective when he went out anywhere and saw the rubble and refuse still spilling into streets. *So much waste.*



I smiled at some of the Haitian friends who had come to pick us up. They were familiar, and I had been praying for them since my last visit. It's hard to know how to pray, so I mostly asked God for his protection and provision. I asked him to encourage them when it all seemed too hard and to convict them when the wrong path tempted them.

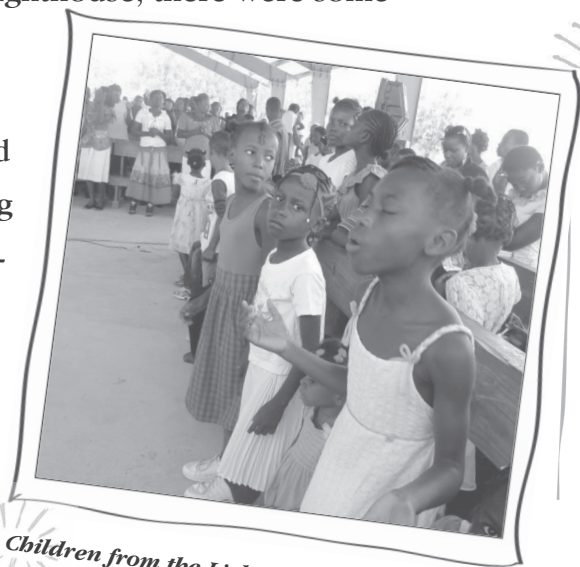
We made our way through Port-au-Prince and headed out of town towards the part of the island that had called me back again and again. It was not because of the accommodations or the landscape—it was the people. The Haitian children I had met and the adults in their lives peppered my dreams and prayer life. Ever since the earthquake, this place had been a part of my life. I wish it hadn't taken something so devastating to meet such wonderful people, but God can do that, bring good out of such hard circumstances.

"Bonjour, Miss Beth," said J.D., one of the boys who had come to greet us.


I hugged him tight. "Tell me about school, how are you doing?" We started a conversation about classes, girls, the rains on the island. It was a natural conversation, like anyone would have with a friend. Haiti has reinforced one of my favorite lessons: we can be friends, good friends, with people who don't share our background, color, or age.

Most of the time, Ronaldo's life followed a predictable routine. He went to school and played basketball or football (soccer), ate meals with his Lighthouse family, and had fun with his brothers. All the kids there at the home were in similar situations. For some reason, their families could not care for them. Sometimes it was because they couldn't—they had died, or were very sick, or were struggling and just didn't have enough resources. Sometimes it was because they wouldn't—they were overwhelmed with their addictions, or had another family already, or just put their priorities somewhere else.

Regardless of the reason, when children came to live in a place like the Lighthouse, there were some broken pieces in their hearts. The adults who served in the homes had the privilege of investing in the lives of these children, reminding them of how God sees them, what he has planned for them, and how he loves them.



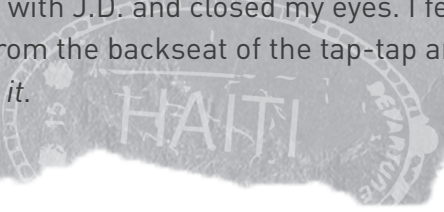
Children from the Lighthouse worship together.



Sometimes it felt like my little efforts and visits couldn't possibly make a difference. I would hear lies in my head, whispered from the enemy, whose design was to keep me away. This is too much, too big for you to do anything about. It doesn't matter who you are or what you do. I would pray to Jesus to remove those lies and replace them with truth.


"All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16).
"We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10). "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17).

The truth always wins. I didn't know why exactly I was there for those days, or how God would use me, but I finished my exchange with J.D. and closed my eyes. I felt the wind on my face from the backseat of the tap-tap and thought, *It's all worth it.*



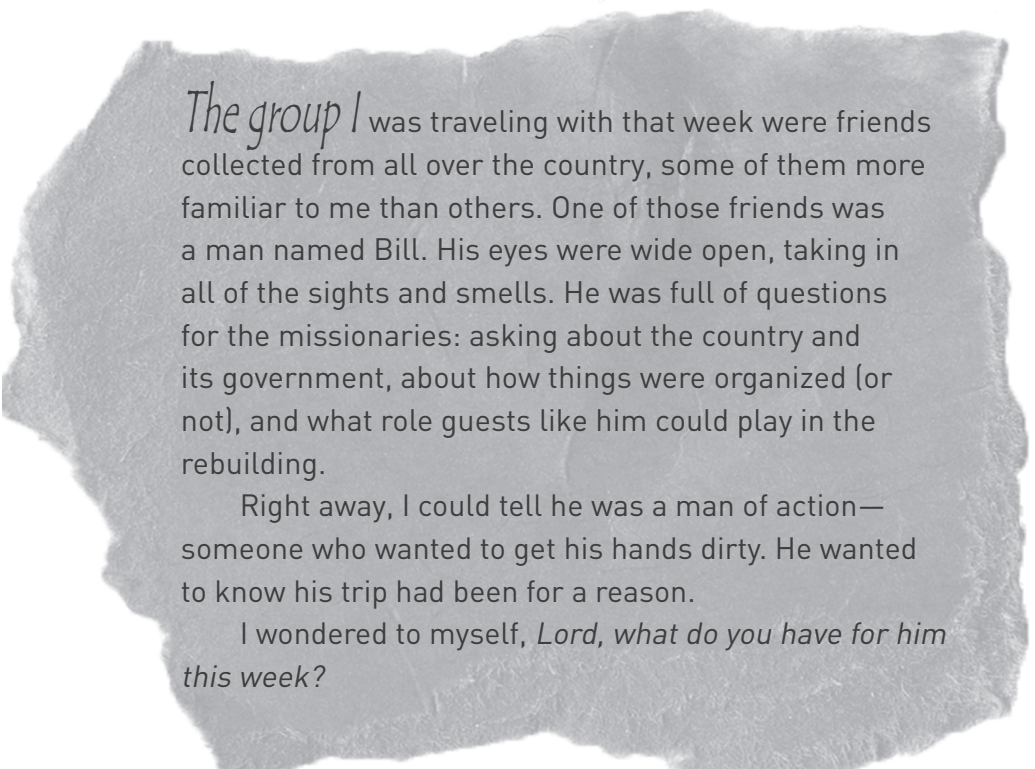
Ronaldo knew our group of visitors was coming to the Lighthouse that day. A few of us had been there before, and he waited to greet us. He loved his home and was kind to the groups of people who cared for him and all the children there.

As he waited, his thoughts wandered, as they



often did these days. He had started to wonder about his future. What would he do after high school? Where would he go? Would he get a job? There were so many questions in his mind. With all that he had been given, Ronaldo now had a solid foundation. He wanted to help others. He wanted to do something to be a part of the rebuilding and renewal that was going on in his country. But what?

What do you have for me, Lord?



The group I was traveling with that week were friends collected from all over the country, some of them more familiar to me than others. One of those friends was a man named Bill. His eyes were wide open, taking in all of the sights and smells. He was full of questions for the missionaries: asking about the country and its government, about how things were organized (or not), and what role guests like him could play in the rebuilding.

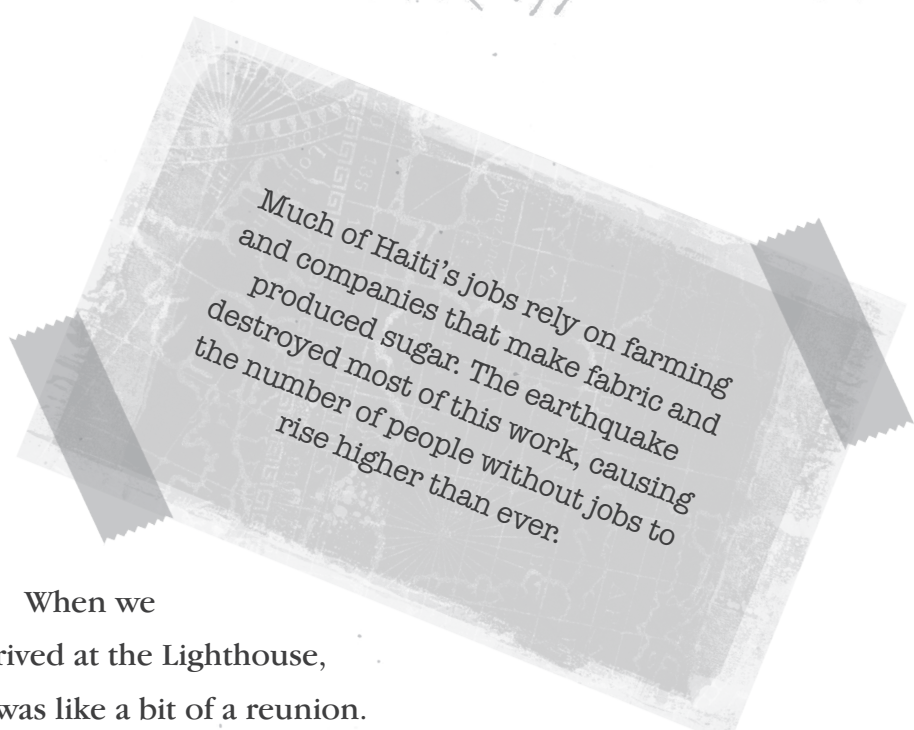

Right away, I could tell he was a man of action—someone who wanted to get his hands dirty. He wanted to know his trip had been for a reason.

I wondered to myself, *Lord, what do you have for him this week?*

I had first met Bill in Monterrey, Mexico, while I was living there. He would come on business from his home in Alabama and stay afterwards to spend a day or so with the kids in the orphanages we served. Over time, he brought his family to meet the children he was befriending, and now that's a part of their family mission. Today, he would tell you he sees people, instead of a cause, and he knows names and has relationships, instead of labels ("the orphan," "the poor").

Those experiences were in Mexico, though; I could tell already Bill was anxious to feel he was among friends here in Haiti.






Much of Haiti's jobs rely on farming and companies that make fabric and produced sugar. The earthquake destroyed most of this work, causing the number of people without jobs to rise higher than ever.

When we arrived at the Lighthouse, it was like a bit of a reunion. Ronaldo hugged those he knew, but then retreated, leaving the team to the first-day rituals of a tour and orientation. He went off to look for his brothers.

One of Ronaldo's caregivers sought me out. The man wondered if I'd have a conversation with Ronaldo about his future. He was looking for as many adults who loved Jesus and kids as possible to reinforce his recurring message: God has a plan for you.




When his caregiver asked me to speak with Ronaldo about his future, I accepted the challenge readily. I knew Ronaldo had one more year left of high school and that he dreamed about going to college. From previous conversations, I knew he'd been asking God for a good job, a good family, and a good life. It was the same hope whispered by Haitians everywhere: *God, if you are listening, help us make it.*

I found him playing basketball. When it was his turn to sit out, I sat by him and asked if we could talk. We started by talking about nothing in particular. I was just warming up the band—asking questions about school, friends, sports, music, his brothers, and so on. He was living in a large family there, so there were many people to get caught up on.

Then we transitioned to harder topics. I finally just asked him, “So, what do you want? What is God whispering to you about your story? Where in all of this island do you see God shining your light?”

Ronaldo felt comfortable with me. He knew I really cared about what he had to say. Somehow, even though we weren't related and despite the fact that we didn't see each other very often, we trusted one



another. But when I looked him in the eyes and asked him what he wanted, what God had been saying to him—he couldn't help it. He froze.


"I can't guess, Ronaldo," I said. "I have no idea what's going on in your heart. Tell me."

He wanted to get up and leave, but his legs were as stuck as his tongue. He suddenly felt afraid. *What if I tell her? What will she say? Will she laugh? Will she think I'm crazy?*

I guessed what he was thinking. "There isn't anything you can say that will make me laugh, or doubt you. You can trust me." I tried to reassure him.

There was a long silence. Ronaldo watched the basketball players. He looked out through the gate, thinking about the city that wasn't so far away. He looked at the water bottle in his hand, the one he'd been drinking from. Then he took a deep breath, and whispered his dream.

"I think God wants me to open up a recycling center."



My eyebrows shot up, and I couldn't hide my surprise. I wasn't sure how to respond. Does anyone even recycle here? I wondered. It seemed like such an unusual, very specific dream. I told myself to keep a straight face, be encouraging, and keep listening. But when I opened my mouth to say something encouraging, I couldn't stop what happened next.

I giggled.

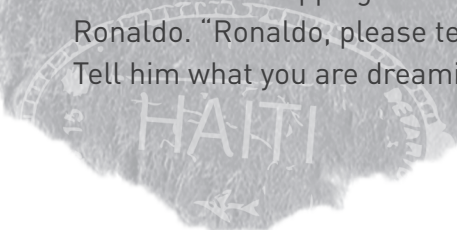
Then the giggle rolled into laughter. Throwing my head up into the air, I couldn't stop laughing. "Oh, Jesus! You are so you!" I blurted out, startling Ronaldo.

The teenager looked at me with hurt in his eyes. Of course, he assumed I was laughing at him—at his dream.

"No, no," I assured him. "Wait, hold on." I turned around and scanned the courtyard for minute, looking for a specific person.

"Bill! Bill, come over here for a second." Bill stopped whatever project he was working on, wiped the sweat from his brow, and came over to where we were sitting. He looked at me inquisitively.

Not even stopping for introductions, I turned back to Ronaldo. "Ronaldo, please tell Bill what you just told me. Tell him what you are dreaming about for your future."





We are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

—Ephesians 2:10



Ronaldo couldn't hide his look of betrayal. After an hour of talking, he had worked up the courage to share, in barely a whisper, his dream with his supposed friend. And now, after laughing in his face, this woman had the nerve to demand that he share his dream with a total stranger?

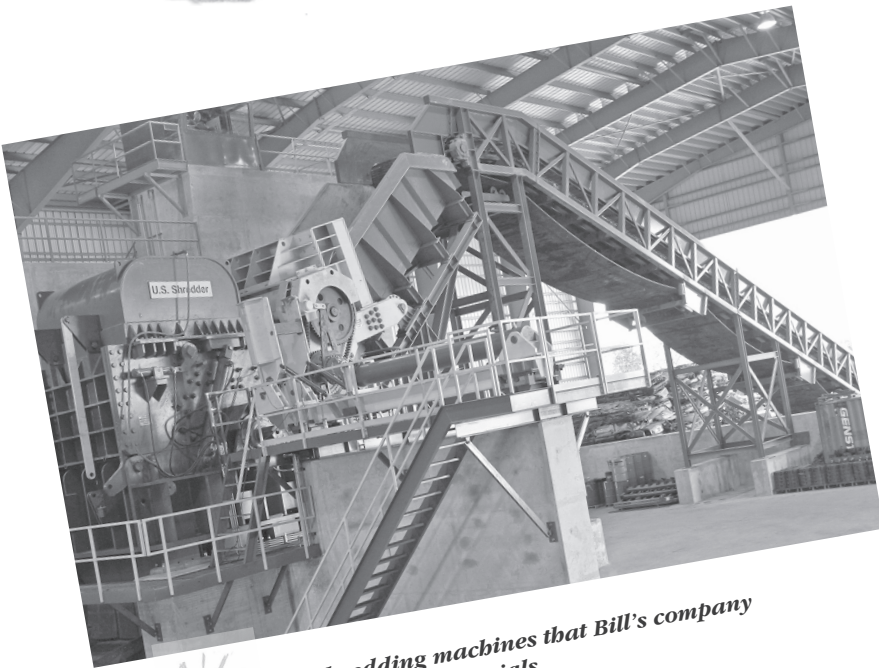
Ronaldo kept his mouth firmly shut. *Pa gen okenn fason! I'm not going to have a stranger laugh at me too.*



Poor Ronaldo. I couldn't blame him for not trusting me. But I wasn't going to let that stop me.

I turned anxiously and excitedly back to Bill. "OK, then. Bill, please introduce yourself here to my friend, Ronaldo, and tell him what you do for a living." I imagined Bill thought this was more than a little strange. But thankfully, even being put on the spot and totally unclear why I was in such a hurry to make this introduction, he complied.

"My name is Bill. I am the president of US Shredder, a recycling company in the US."



One of the shredding machines that Bill's company creates for recycling materials.



To read more about
Ronaldo and other stories,
get your copy of *Tales of
the Ones He Won't Let Go.*



*But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;
you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless.*

—Psalm 10:14

