

## ***Introduction***

When my mom slipped through the veil on September 18, 2017, I knew immediately God was calling me to write this book. I tried to escape it. I politely offered God a million excuses from being too busy, lacking the skills to format and put these devotions together (I have a hard time writing an organized grocery list), and still grieving the loss of my mom so deep in my heart that it was a physical pain. Like Jonah, I saw the book as my Nineveh. I wasn't going to that writing shore, but...here I am putting the finishing touches on the book...my Nineveh...written with instructions similar to those given to Noah.

It was hard sometimes putting these thoughts together because I had to reflect on some wonderful memories that would never happen again. Some days I procrastinated and found a million other things to do. BUT GOD kept calling me to complete this. It was a real journey for me remembering all of the sweet Warrior's from 5<sup>th</sup> Street, walking up the hill to visit my grandparents, sweat tea on the back porch, days of laughter and childhood memories...so many memories...that were now over and seemed like a lifetime ago.

This forty-day legacy journey is going to take you back to 5<sup>th</sup> Street in Des Moines, Iowa to a neighborhood referred to as Highland Park. You'll find that life is a little slower...a little more meaningful...a little more insightful...from the view on the hill of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. It's where my roots are. It's where my foundation of faith was laid. I grew up in a 100-year-old house on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Street, with my grandparents living four houses away, and my great grandparents a few houses from them. Then there were the sweet ladies (and you'll find a few gentleman too) of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. I call them the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Warrior's. God placed these wonderful people on 5<sup>th</sup> Street as part of His perfect plan.

My mom became ill when I was in kindergarten. She was misdiagnosed for several years and left to deal with intermittent symptoms that would often hospitalize her for days or even months. Those were hard years for her, but she never complained. I've wondered many times since she slipped through the veil how she got through those very difficult years...a young wife and mother...with symptoms that often debilitated her and the doctor's couldn't seem to find a diagnosis for years.

Unfortunately, during the time that the doctors were unable to provide a diagnosis for her symptoms...they decided that she was bringing on the symptoms herself for attention. Their diagnosis of choice...she was mentally ill. Their treatment to cure her was shock treatments in the psychiatric ward. After months of shock treatments she didn't know who I was, or who she was for that matter. When I was in third grade she almost died from uremic poisoning...they ignored her symptoms because they didn't believe her. After she was again hospitalized, they discovered the potentially fatal condition with her kidneys. She eventually made her way to Iowa City. After a short time there she was given a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis.

In later years, I remember my mom telling me that most people don't want to hear they have a disease, but when the doctor's in Iowa City finally, after years, figured out what was wrong...she cried with relief that somebody finally believed her. She lost years of her life and received incorrect medical treatment almost robbing her of her sanity.

After her diagnosis of MS she refused to quit fighting to once again regain her life. There was to be more suffering for my mom as the years went on, but she showed true Warrior strength. She received a diagnosis of an aggressive form of cancer in 1997. Her treatments consisted of the maximum amount of radiation her body could tolerate. Shortly after her surgery to remove a

cancerous tonsil she suffered a hemorrhage in her throat and almost died. She never missed a day of work while receiving radiation treatments. She worked at her job until 1:00, and then went to her radiation treatment at 2:00 and then home for a nap before dinner. Yes, she was tired, but she was never without peace and strong determination that she would win the battle. She did! She lived twenty more year's cancer free.

I didn't realize how much strength she had until she was gone and I've looked back at her life. I always knew she was a fighter and had a strong faith, but I didn't realize just how much she relied on God during those times in her life...to accomplish so much through her little 100 pound petite frame until just recently.

In talking to my Dad as I've put this book together, he says he still questions the diagnosis of MS. My mom's symptoms eventually resolved and after my parents moved a few years later, she did not have any MS symptoms ever return. He suspects it may have been something from the lead pipes in the old house. We'll never know. But what I do know...my mom endured years of suffering and never gave up. I don't remember her ever saying, "Why me?" or "Poor me", she was always trying to help someone else. Some help others out of good health. My mom helped others out of her often poor health. God blessed His Warrior, my mom.

Putting this together brought up some questions I wished I could have asked my mom. They were things I didn't think of until after she slipped through the veil. I didn't dwell on her years being ill, but remembering them while writing this book docked on the shores of Nineveh...I had questions. I prayed for God to give me peace about my questions, or to somehow reveal the answers. As only God could...about a week before this book was going to be published...He revealed the answers. Get some tissues, sister, you might need them here as God lovingly showed me again...with Him all things are possible.

I was visiting my Dad one evening and he said he had found something he wanted to give me. Now, I had not told my Dad about my questions or prayers for answers. He went and retrieved a stack of index cards. He said he randomly found them in a drawer. On the cards, in my mother's own handwriting, was basically all the answers to my questions! Seriously, it's ok if you have a few tears too at the graciousness of our God. I mean really...answering the questions in my mom's own handwriting. At some point several years ago, she had given a talk to her church group and she basically wrote down the most important moments of her life on those cards and then just tucked them away. God having my Dad get in that drawer the week before this book went to publication was an answer to prayer.

When books are written many times there's a 'back story' that plays out behind the main frame of the scenes in each chapter. I share this early part of my mom's journey so as you travel this adventure on 5<sup>th</sup> Street, you'll know the 'back story' of what was going on during that time period. When the book talks about how I loved to hear my mom laugh on the back porch, it was because that was a day she could use her right arm and had normal vision, because there were days her right arm and leg didn't work and she had double vision or no vision in the right eye. Laughter was on days when life felt normal. God gave us those days too among the difficult ones. He surrounded our family with the 5<sup>th</sup> Street Warrior's and now here they are being introduced to you!

I often refer to 5<sup>th</sup> Street being a version of a real life Mayberry. My Dad, Sheriff Andy Taylor and an amazing variety of Aunt Bee's in all shapes and sizes. It was a safe place on scary days of watching my mom endure illness. A place that always felt like home because Jesus was there. God

walked that hill on 5<sup>th</sup> Street holding firm the hand of His Warrior daughter, my mom, Esther...yep, just like Queen Esther!

Since God answered my prayers with the index cards penned by my mom, what a better introduction then to use her words to show you her faith...the 'back story' of this entire book. This is not a sad book that dwells on illness; in fact it is rarely mentioned. When faith moves to the main focus...a struggling 'back story' moves to the back. You'll find your journey to 5<sup>th</sup> Street (Mayberry) a delight for the soul. Despite the 'back story' life can be amazing when you trust everything to God and believe that He can do all things, Sweet Warrior...for a time such as this.

In her own words...my mom's testimony of faith...(thanks, Mom, for being brave enough to write these words...an answer to prayer many years later...BUT GOD)

*I was born into a family of nine children. I was next to the last. My parents also raised another child. We were share croppers and very poor. I learned early to deal with illness. At age 2 I had rheumatic fever. At age 6 I suffered malnutrition so severely I had to go stay with another family. At age 11 the rheumatic fever returned and I spent time in the children's hospital. My clothes caught on fire when I was 15 and it took about a year for me to recover.*

*God always provided for our family. I attended a Baptist church with a wonderful Sunday school teacher. At age 12 I accepted Christ. It was wonderful that Christ would choose me and I would be as important to Him as anyone. I was baptized in Batey Creek. They sang on Jordon's Stormy Banks. There were many things I couldn't do because of lack of money – but these things did not make a difference.*

*God was so wonderful to provide me with a mate that would always be there. In our early life I became very ill and was crippled with MS for about 12 years. During this time many things took place in our lives. There was a period of time when I made trips to the hospital each night because I couldn't breathe - finally was diagnosed with uremic poisoning. I often think of that...but, by then, I myself too was convinced I was crazy. Things went downhill - they finally decided I needed shock treatments. I didn't have a Bible there. But I hid John 3:16 in my heart. After I knew no one, I felt like I had enough. I came home and I'd lost weight. Some of my clothes in the closet didn't fit. I wondered if I had been put in the right home. Our dear friends and neighbors always had time for me. But with God's gracious love, I began to gain insight on things.....*

*(later)...they said they didn't think I could work so they sent me to the disability office. But, I rented a typewriter (to practice) and got the first job I interviewed for. They really didn't think I could do it, **but with God's help and guidance it was accomplished.** I was able to teach Sunday school again. Shell (her husband and my Dad) and I became youth leaders for Wednesday youth. Then we gained the opportunity to work with the mentally challenged for the next 22 years. We grew to love them as our own. At first they seemed so different but as we grew to know them we loved them. Shell taught the lessons and I played the accordion and we sang. We had parties for them. All the people in our church were wonderful to them.*

*Our minister approached me about being part of the Care Center Ministries Team. I also got to be part of that ministry for about 22 years. Our good friends did this with me. We went each Wednesday night. We made popcorn, sang songs, and we visited. We saw and experienced many things. Some of which I'll not go into. I planned many funerals when there was no family. Shell and his friends would be pallbearers. I saw real cases of abuse and we were able to help in some cases, but not all. **I never considered these things a burden but the opportunity to serve God.***

**God's love and grace has always seen me through.** I'm so thankful for my family, my church, and my friends. He has always been there for me. I've received so much love and kindness from everyone in life. Even through cancer and 39 days of radiation I was able to work.

**...Once again, God's wonderful hand is revealed to me. God is no stranger in a faraway place, but God is as close as the breeze that blows...**

*Esther Stout – Warrior, Safely Home*

## ***Welcome to 5<sup>th</sup> Street Warrior Sister...or 'I Want to be' a Warrior Sister!***

I'm so glad you've picked up this forty-day devotional book! The Bible never mentions coincidences, so my heart believes...there's a divine purpose this book has found its way into your hands. As we travel together to my childhood neighborhood through the next forty days my prayer for you, Sweet Sister, is that God will use the words on these pages to write His message on your heart. The Bible shows us God's plans are always thought out and organized, not haphazard and coincidental. Perhaps you're a lifetime faith Warrior and you've been through many seasons of painful struggles, or maybe as you hold this book in your hands, God is in the process of molding you into a Warrior during a very hard season your walking through, or perhaps, our all-knowing God who sees your future, knows you'll be walking a path where you'll need to be reminded that in His strength, you are indeed a Warrior.

The definition of a Warrior is a person engaged, or experienced in warfare, a person entangled in struggle or conflict. The Bible warns us we will face battles in this life, but it assures us God will be with us...don't panic! The Message Bible puts it this way, "Don't panic. I'm with you. There's no need to fear for I'm your God. I'll give you strength. I'll help you. I'll hold you steady, keep a firm grip on you" Isaiah 41:10. The battles we face will not just affect us...but those who are coming after us...the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call (Acts 2:39)...our legacy is affected by our battles. The discerning heart knows we are to be Warriors for this generation and the one coming after us.

Years ago my Sunday school teacher taught our class God's Warrior song. Each week she inducted us to be part of 'God's Army'. As young children, we would loudly sing these words as we over embellished each battle motion -

I may never march in the infantry  
Ride in the cavalry  
Shoot the artillery  
I may never shoot for the enemy  
But I'm in the Lord's army!

That Warrior Sunday School teacher...was my mom. She was my Warrior...until one day; she wasn't... because God called the Warrior home. My heart broke.

I never set out to be a Warrior. I've had many roles in life including daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, friend, sister, and aunt. Leading a women's ministry and writing books is certainly not how I pictured my life. I was a career girl...100%. Perhaps I should have seen my future more clearly when I ran into my kindergarten teacher in my late 20's.

Just minutes after bumping into her, literally at the check-out of the grocery store...with my three little girls in tow...she had the audacity to ask me...if I had written my first book! I remember thinking...I don't even go to the bathroom alone much less find time to write a book. However, in the middle of the grocery store, she made a proclamation over me. She spoke God's plan years before it happened. As we chatted in the grocery store, her voice full of quiet teacher authority, she stated that out of all the students she taught, she always **knew**...that I would be the student that would write a book. After I finished pulling my crying three-year-old away from the candy rack, and stopping my other two daughters from arguing over if one of them had freckles...my

sweet teacher concluded by saying that I was in her Kindergarten class the last year that she taught school. In years to come, the details of that brief encounter would play out exactly as she stated.

As my journey has unfolded...I've went back to that grocery store meeting many times, and considered all the details she gave that day...realizing that if I would have started kindergarten just one year later, I never would have met Mrs. Marjorie Hawkins at Clarkson Elementary School. God had been meticulously planning my years growing up on 5<sup>th</sup> Street. It was there I attended Clarkson Elementary School...allowing my kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hawkins to see her grocery store prediction come true years later...as she edited the first book I wrote in 2016, *Entwined*. Isn't it funny, beautiful, mind blowing, and absolutely amazing...how God works? It is miraculous how He brings everything together at exactly the right time. Things we cannot possibly conceive or comprehend. I never thought that day in the grocery store...as two of my daughters fought over freckles...and my youngest almost toppled over a candy rack...that I would ever write a book! I have tears as I reread those words...what an extraordinary planner God is. Overseeing every single detail of His grand design. We don't even realize we're taking tiny little steps, often in the mundane every day...steps, that we don't even recognize as anything significant...like running into your kindergarten teacher chasing three little girls around the grocery store counting freckles....and having her declare your future. God's plans take time, persistence, belief, wrestling, acceptance of His will, obedience, faith, and complete trust that He is Who He says He is.

God's plans will make us His Warriors!

Warriors battles are often unseen by others.

Warriors victories are often not recognized by the masses.

Warriors do not seek after earthly rewards, but heavenly treasures.

Warriors wield the spiritual weapons and armor of God.

Warriors realize there are those following after them that need a spiritual legacy to help them know the way.

I earned my true official Warrior badge on September 18, 2017, at 3:15 a.m. I stood outside of the doorway where my mom was stepping from the battles of this life to the treasures of the next. I would continue from that moment on without my lifetime Warrior mentor. She had just turned 78-years-old. My mom, who shared the same name as Queen Esther, was a true Warrior. She grew up in a family of 10 children in the remote plains of Oklahoma. Her family lived in a tiny farmhouse that sat along a red dirt road. She endured many years of hard places of suffering. Her family was very poor. When she was only six-years-old she suffered malnutrition to the extent that she was going to die without intervention. A schoolteacher and her husband who lived in town invited my mom to come stay with them until she could regain her health. Within six months she was thriving and returned home. My mom always said how kind the school teacher and her husband were while she lived with them. She never forgot that. I think my mom became a Warrior at 6-years-old. She didn't have an easy life, but she learned to be grateful in all circumstances for the good things God gave her. He created in her a courageous Warrior who battled many things in her lifetime.

My grandmother, my dad's mother, was also a Warrior. I grew up four houses away from my grandparents on 5<sup>th</sup> Street. My great grandparents lived a few houses away from them. Like my mother, my grandmother grew up with her three siblings on a farm located outside of the small Midwest town of Colfax, Iowa. She was born in 1913. There were many things she had seen in her lifetime when she passed away at the age of 90 in April 2004. Growing up living by my faithful grandmother was one of the best gifts that God could have ever given to me. I got to witness her

Warrior faith daily. Even on the day God called her home her faith never wavered. Her joy and strength truly came from the Lord. She was always waiting for Jesus to return. He created in her a faithful and watchful Warrior.

To the naked eye there was nothing special about this little community of houses that set along the steep hill of 5<sup>th</sup> Street. But on that hill, behind those painted front doors, God surrounded me with a tribe of women who were Warrior's, each in their own way...silent, strong, bold, courageous, Bible reading, teaching, mentoring, praying, amazingly beautiful women...who influenced my life and faith journey. I walked that hill many times visiting those familiar houses.

The devotions on these pages are from the true life journeys of women who were faith Warrior's in my circle. My hope is you'll deeply feel the hearts of these women through these pages filled with laughter and tears, love and joy, fear and faith, learning and growing, young and old, illness and health, life and death...but they all have one common thread...they show the compassion and grace God poured out on His Warrior daughters. Through them, He created the Warriors of 5<sup>th</sup> Street.

When I first encountered my Kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Hawkins, all those years ago in the grocery store, she made a dramatic declaration about my future. God has made a declaration over your future. He loves you, He sees your heart, He knows where you've been, where you're at, and where you're headed. He sees the battles of your past, your present, and your future...I pray He's going to use this book to prepare you as a Warrior for Christ...for this generation and the next. God is a God of order and organization. His Warrior Manuel tells us in Jeremiah 29:11...He has a plan for you...He knows the plan. He designed the plan with you in mind. You may not have a Mrs. Hawkins declaring your future over you at a grocery store as you chase little girls around counting freckles...but Jeremiah 29:11 says the Lord Himself has declared it. And so we are inducted as we sing, "I'm in the Lord's army".

Pull up a chair on the old back porch and take in the view. Get comfortable for this journey together.

*Welcome to 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Sweet Warrior...*