

The Accident

February 14, 1982

Chapter 1

On the sun visor of the van was a Valentine addressed to "Tessie" - Inside were the words "To the wonderful girl I married" Although the printed words seemed to express his true feelings, he added a personal note: "All my love, All my life. They died together that day - Tommy and Tessie - at her feet wrapped in a blanket, alive and very frightened was their only child - a little boy 3 years old named Daniel. Dale Hill a favorite camping place for Tommy and Tessie and her mother Gloria - several other family members and friends were among the campers. The woods are a scenic picture of forest grandeur with cold, gushing springs of clear water. Perfect for camping. When they arrived at the campsite the men immediately built "our house" provisions in a secluded spot for the ladies. The late winter air was crisp, but pleasant. It was an ideal setting for a family to the outdoors and is able to spend time together away from the city. One thing was especially noted - - Tessie, who was always so well dressed and acclimatized to city living, through herself into the joy of camping. Someone told me how she went walking through the woods in her white rabbit fur coat

and wearing her boots. Across her shoulder was a shotgun and she appeared to be going hunting. After the accident the white fur coat was never seen again. No doubt someone who was involved in the processing the needed details regarding the accident took it. As reported there seemed to be an air of urgency to enjoy the day of it's fullest. Those who survived still look back at that fated time and feel a sense of pleasure when remembering the happy atmosphere. Dan who was almost 3 year old - (birthday February 23, 1979), was very busy in the activities of the day. How could he know that in a few short hours he would suffer the loss of his dear young parents? To be just a little 3 year old boy alone. This was Valentine's Day and none of the men brought Valentines to their wives except Tommy. The other campers pretend to be angry with Tommy because his thoughtfulness had made them look "bad" of course, it was in the spirit of friendship. On the way home they stopped at their friend's house (The Pasley Family) and ate some sandwiches and took a hot shower. Later Tommy got down on the floor and played with the children. He had such a love for children. The Pasleys' reported such a happy atmosphere at their home that Tommy and Tessie seemed to have a happy life together. After they left the Pasley home they headed toward the state line and the town of Washum and then to home. On the way they stopped at a small country store at Long Street and bought some treats and other supplies to take to their lake house. After word was out concerning the accident, the man (his name is unknown) who owned the store

told some of his employees that he felt that was the nice, happy young couple that had just left his place of business with their young child- When he learn that it was indeed the same little family he set up a jar in his store for collections to be used as needed. Nothing is known of their activities from that time until the fateful accident-- Perhaps as they rode along they discussed the day's events and even talked of plans for the next day and days ahead. Nothing is actually known of the exact reason the van left the road and struck a large oak tree-head on! The roads in the area are known for their pot holes-and there are major causes of accidents. In the lonely isolation in the wooded area just off the Parish road - the van was halted and stood in eerie silence harboring a tragic secret. Inside was a young vibrant family that ceased to be. There was not much traffic at that time of night and the accident wasn't discovered for awhile - someone spoke of passing by and hearing the cry of a child -Daniel, the only survivor. He was transported to L.S.U Medical Center. Tessie was carried by ambulance to L.S.U. Medical Center - Yes alive, but did not live to reach the hospital. C.P.R. was administered and everything possible was done for her - Yes, she expired a few moments before she reached the hospital. The tragic news was carried to Tessie's mother and husband - She reached the hospital shortly after Tessie "left us." There are no words to describe the utter desolation one feels at a time like this. The Patterson's were at their fishing camp a distance away. At that time they had no telephone so their daughter (Terri) carried

the terrible news to them along with Tommy's employer - that night scars of grief consumed all concerned and there will never be a complete healing. Only by the grace of God can they "go on." But the fact of the matter that Daniel is still here with us is a miracle in itself. It's a source of comfort to us?

Chapter Two

The hospital stay -

Daniel was carried to L.S.U Hospital by ambulance - a little boy alone and frightened". He was placed in a unit with adults with open-heart surgery, and stayed a few days until he was stabilized. Family and loved ones were so broken and torn trying to reach through to reality - not even to be able to cope with their own level of grief. When his "Pa" and I visited him, he had lapsed into a deep coma which was to continue for several weeks. The young doctor stood by his bed and he was there when Daniel was brought to the hospital. He was still alert and very frightened. But as his brain began to swell from the injuries, he lapsed into the Coma. We experienced the darkest days of our Lives at 4:00 my husband would wake me and say "lets go." I would get up get dressed and we would go to the Hospital room - shortly there after Mr. Pete Patterson would come in and say, I couldn't sleep. We shared a

great-grandson and he shared a grandson - we talked quietly not knowing the exact of the damage that Daniel had experienced - We could only hope - when there seemed no hope at all. He remained there a few more days and we were told they were getting ready to transfer him to Schumpert P.I.C.U - I asked if some of the family was needed during the transfer and was assured that we were not needed at that time. The transfer was made sometime during the night, I called the next morning to inquire about visitation and was told a limited number of names were on his list. When we walked into the P.I.C.U unit the next morning, our spirits were lifted. The unit was so impressive, bright, clean and seemingly had every piece of equipment needed to care for Daniel. There he lay sound asleep between his two world so still, so helpless, so beloved. The long night of watching and waiting for Daniel's "return" had begun. The news media carried much coverage of this tragic accident. My Sister, Mrs. Ray who lived in El Dorado was watching the news on TV when she heard the report of the accident - they did not give names only unidentified woman and a small 3 year old child were involved who had survived. Tommy and Tessie on the other hand fought for a few hours and Daniel until this date. We had called sister's son to go and tell his mother - (she had a heart condition) when he walked in she said there news of an accident in Shreveport they named Tommy isn't that the named of Tessie's husband? And Daniel a 3 year old! He told her to sit down and he told her it was truly them. My friend Hilda Franks

was the social worker at the hospital and she told how they were flooded by phone calls from people who wanted the little boy who had survived. One called in particular impressed her. It was from a young woman (Mother of 5) who said, I have children of my own but if I can have this little boy I would put him right in with own and raise him like my own. One of the larger Baptist Church's called for information on Dan's name, etc, and said their church was going to use their evening service praying for Daniel. It makes one happy to know that our fellow human beings still have love and tenderness in their hearts when necessity calls upon them to display kindness.

Chapter Three

Daniel is now Ward of the State

I am giving my own account of these days, I will continue. Each morning I would go by to see Daniel and stay a short while since I was working at our Church's private school monitory. When I would walk in I would always ask any change and they would reply "No Change" Even though everything Medically possible was being done for Daniel, there came a time when human endurance fails. One morning when I went in and they said "No Change," I collapsed in a chair and began to weep - overshadowing this event was the thought of to new graves in Centuries

Memorial, the parents of this young child. Grief upon grief-yes the doctor said he was a "great fighter fighting for his life. To us- he was such a frail little boy with wires all over to keep him sustain life a vigil was kept for any sign of change. Daniel and his cousin Dave, liked to come to our house and take a teaspoon and go dig in my little backyard garden. It was suggested that Dave come to the unit and talk to Daniel. This he did sitting on a stool by his bedside. He called Daniel's name and said come on Daniel let's go dig in Nanny's garden. There seemed to be a "lively moment of stirring" as if heard. We were so encouraged. We were encouraged to talk to him - day by day and all night upon night. This P.T.C.U had several large rocking chairs and a group of ladies known as the rocket's would come in and hold these small patients in their laps and rock them. Once, I was asked if I would like to hold him, and of course, I was overjoyed - They placed him in my lap tubes and all and I held him so close to if I could give him new life. Mr. and Mrs. Patterson and their daughter Terri came in about that time, and we rejoiced together. One night, Dr. Gus came in and went to check on Daniel's report and I heard him saying, "praise the Lord, praise the Lord". It seems the fluid that was on Daniel's brain - due to the swelling had receded and surgery of this condition would not be necessary. Of all the good things that has happened right there, this Doctor's giving thanks to God, was the greatest and most impressive one of alone of all to me. The nurses in the P.T.C.U were all R.N's and had total care of their patients,

even to the changing of diapers. All were gentle, kind and compassionate and we felt Daniel was safe in their care. There was one male Nurse (time has caused me to forget his full name), but I remember him as David. He took a very special interest in Daniel's progress. He said once I predicted he will go into a deep sleep and when he wakes up he will remember. Daniel was three years old when the accident happened and it seemed the years were over. One day two doctors tossed him a stuffed toy - Daniel reached for it and he was four months up until this time, he would open his eyes and look all around at the ceiling with recognition of anything.

Chapter Four

Regaining His Strength

Margaret Cartouche was his therapist and the time came for Daniel to be moved to a little private room within the confines of the P.I.C.U. He was placed in bed with a TV facing him - He was daily exposed to the sight of moving objects and sound. Up until this time the nurses were having difficulty getting him to eat the "soft food" - he would scatter it all over their uniforms and they would have to change more than once during a feeding. There was one other "little thing" that Daniel like to do - and that was going through my purse and finding "chewing gum", I would always make it available to him and we enjoyed this together. On this

particular day - Terri and I were standing by his bedside. We had kept watch for a long time - Then he open his eyes and looked at us. Terri reached down took one of his fingers and put it in her mouth and lightly bit it then he grabbed her hand and bit one of her fingers in a playful manner - We were all laughing! I handed him a piece of gum and he put it in his mouth and he began to chew on it - We were almost beside ourselves with joy. Up until that time, I would have him a piece of gum and he would hold it and turn it over and over and lay it down. We called the nurse - she was "beside herself" and ask what kind of food did Daniel normally like - I remembered he loved string beans - she called the kitchen and told them to cancel the food prepared for Daniel and told them to send up sting beans, hot dog, and I don't know what else was ordered. When the food came he looked at it and took each string bean and stood them up side by side (like soldiers) along the edge of his plate - Then he began to eat - O joy of joys.