

This is a speech I prepared for a UMW (United Methodist Women) program:

The Miracle (My Witness)

My name is Betty Hill-Bonebright, as most of you know. I used to think that miracles only happened in Bible times, but I was mistaken. There are still miracles. I'd like to share my miraculous experience with you and I hope it will inspire you to recognize and to share your experiences with others. I'm sure that everyone has some experiences that can be valuable to others.

All of my life I've felt very close to God. I've felt Jesus was my friend & my helper in time of need. In fact, one of my favorite songs is "What a Friend We Have in Jesus".

I had a loving, earthly father, so it was very easy for me to believe in a loving heavenly Father. When 12 years old, I took the training course for church membership and was baptized into the Methodist Church. I felt especially close to God whenever I attended Camp Lakeside near Scott City. The atmosphere, nature, devotions, and everything we did stressed God's handiwork. As a teen-ager, I attended MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship) and later served as president of it. I will never forget those experiences which helped me grow. But there came a time in my life when I questioned God's love & even felt a little betrayed. I have to give you some background for that.

I was a senior in high school in 1949-50. I had no real goals in life other than to get married & have children, but at the time I graduated there wasn't anybody I was seriously interested in, though I did have a marriage proposal. Goodland's Methodist Pastor, Rev. Walter Dellinger, encouraged me to go to Southwestern College in Winfield, KS, so I decided to take teacher training. I really enjoyed those years at SW College. The people & atmosphere were Christian and there were Bible courses. I continually felt God's presence there and I found the love of my life there....though circumstances prevented our future together. I earned my 60 hr. teaching certificate in 1952.

My first teaching position was in Kanorado, KS, which is west of Goodland on the Kansas/Colorado border. I taught 5th & 6th graders for 2 years. During Christmas vacation of 1952, I married Leland Neal Hill, a Navy veteran of WW II. He was a newspaperman, but soon expressed a desire to attend college so we moved to Hays in 1954 where I finished my requirements for a degree and Neal started his teacher training.

Our plans & finances did not yet include children, but in 1955 God blessed us with a beautiful, precocious, little girl whom we named Kathi Lourine. A year after her birth, I obtained a 3rd grade teaching position at Lincoln School in Hays, KS. There were many evenings when all three of us sat at the same table---Neal, studying, I grading papers, & Kathi Lou drawing. As most children, Kathi was curious...one day at mealtime she pointed to the milk carton and asked. "What's that?" She had observed the large "A" of the "Grade A" on the milk carton and may have related it to printing she'd seen me do. She wanted to know what it was. She remembered & recognized other A's. I thought that was unusual for so young a child. At age 2 yrs. 7 mos., her drawings of people included a head with hair, 3-dimensional features of eyes, nose, mouth, & ears, arms & legs. Such details indicated an age equivalent of 5 yrs. 5 mos. according to a school psychologist who based it on the Goodenough Draw-a-Person Intelligence Test.

Neal graduated from college in 1958 & I resigned from Lincoln School. We moved back to Goodland where we both were employed in the school system---he was the English/Journalism teacher & I was the 3rd grade teacher at Grant Grade School. We were so happy! Our lives were perfect! We had our first home instead of a meager apartment, bought our first furniture, Kathi had her own room with a bed (other than a baby bed) & my mother had agreed to be the babysitter so I had no fear of Kathi being trained wrong, or abused or anything. Kathi had her 3rd birthday in August. School had been in session one week.

THEN on 5th of September, 1958, TRAGEDY STRUCK! Our world shattered---never again to be the same! I've never understood why it all had to happen. That Friday evening I was finishing up dinner dishes while Neal & Kathi were running around the living room playing "Gunsmoke". Everything seemed perfectly fine. Later I rocked her to sleep, as usual. Neal went to bed & I was preparing for bed when I heard strange cries coming from Kathi's room...not normal. I went to her, picked her up, & rocked her back to sleep...then, I headed for bed. Before I lay down, I again heard her cries of pain. I went to her again & rocked her, but suddenly realized she was very hot and was breathing too fast. I took her temperature---it was 104.5 degrees---so high that I thought I'd not taken it correctly. I shook the thermometer down to take it again. In the 4 minutes it took to take it rectally, her temperature had risen to 105.6 degrees. I put Kathi in bed with a hastily awakened father, & went to phone a doctor---suddenly realizing I didn't know any local doctors. Emotionally seeking advice, I called my mother and learned that her doctor was Dr. Madden. I called his home, receiving no answer, so again called Mom who suggested I call the

hospital. After hearing our dilemma, the personnel said they'd contact Dr. Madden. Sometime during this time Kathi vomited. I can no longer remember all the events that transpired---nor their sequence. We were so scared---felt so helpless---young parents facing a new problem---one for which we were unprepared. I'd heard that high fevers could cause convulsions! All kinds of fears surfaced.

Dr. Madden soon called us. After confirming the information, he said he didn't like the combination of high fever & vomiting. He'd be right over. (In 1958, house calls were still common.) He arrived so quickly that when I heard a car and peeked out the window, I saw him park and get out of his car, still tucking his shirt into his trousers, as he approached the front door. After examining Kathi, he advised hospitalization and requested that I stay there all night with her because they were short of nurses. He didn't know what her illness was---possibly flu. At the hospital, they medicated her but Kathi slept fitfully.

The next day a spinal tap and medical tests were made. The doctor and the medical technician were there in the basement lab all Saturday afternoon. Dr. Madden reported to me periodically to tell me the results of the tests. They first thought it was Meningitis (Spinal Meningitis) but the germs were tiny & growing so slowly that they couldn't really be sure; it might be Encephalitis. He told me the long-term effects of Meningitis and its advantages over Encephalitis. The next time Dr. Madden reported to me, he & the technician thought it was Encephalitis, not Meningitis, so he related the long term effects of Encephalitis & its advantages over Meningitis. This reversal of opinions happened three or four times that afternoon. Each time he'd try to reassure me by telling me the good things about the one and the bad things about the other. Needless to say, I was very nervous all day and once nearly fainted---but I wasn't about to let that happen because I didn't want to get booted out of the room. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small." Proverbs 24:10

During that day, Kathi had had IV feedings which did not work because her veins were so tiny. Then they put it in her thigh, but her leg just swelled up. They finally did a "cut-down" on the inside of her elbow & put the IV directly into the vein; the blood clotted.

About 1:30 that afternoon, my mother came to stay with her so I could go home & rest. I went home for three hours but couldn't sleep, so went back to the hospital. Neal came from work about 2:30. At suppertime when I was trying to feed her Jello, Kathi became unresponsive. She started going into convulsions. I called the nurse. When she arrived, I went to the phone to call my husband who was at my parent's home. I was so shook up that I couldn't recall their number. I dialed the operator, but couldn't talk. Finally I squeaked enough to get out my father's name, so the operator connected us. I asked for Neal. Then all I could get out, was "Come". Neal raced up there, thinking Kathi was already dead. The convulsions lasted two hours. While he was there, he noticed that Kathi's breathing was uneven. Her eyes rolled back. He exclaimed "She needs oxygen." and sent me to get a nurse. "If any among you is afflicted, let him pray. And the prayer of faith shall save the sick & the Lord shall raise him up.." James 5:13,15. "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy & find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:16 "Cast all your care upon Him for He careth for you." I Peter 5:7

During all this time, I'd been praying for her. It was all confusing and so emotional. I started questioning God and His goodness. I asked, "Why did this happen?" "Why couldn't it have been me?" "Why?" I asked what horrible sin we parents had committed that such punishment should be visited upon us. (I could think of only minor infractions.) I even threatened Him, saying I couldn't live without her---if she died, I would not have another baby---too painful. "My flesh & my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart & my portion forever." Psalm 73:26 "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart & saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Psalms 4:18-19

I could not let go of my child. I asked God to save her life---begging him not to take her from me. "And Jairus besot Jesus greatly saying, 'My little daughter lieth at the point of death. I pray thee come & lay thy hands on her that she may be healed & she shall live.'" Mark 5:23 Soon I reasoned that God doesn't send punishments & tragedies. Such things come as a result of natural & sequential forces set in motion in the world---the results of man's sins. God is good. He doesn't ordinarily interfere with the laws of nature. "For whom the Lord loved, He chasteneth....He chasteneth us for our profit that we might be partakers of His holiness." Hebrews 12:6,10 "...Though He cause grief, yet will He have compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:31-6

After much consideration, I asked the doctor about the possibility of getting Kathi to a children's hospital where finer, more delicate equipment might better meet her needs. He replied that that was what she needed but she couldn't go until her condition improved because she couldn't endure the ambulance trip. The crisis would be over by midnight, he predicted---she would either live or die by then.

Kathi remained unconscious with a fever of 106 plus, her heart beating so fast they couldn't count it. I'm still praying---asking God "Why?" & trying to resolve all my thoughts. "Cast all your cares upon Him for He careth for you." 1 Peter 5:7 "And Jesus said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me.'" 2 Corinthians 12:9

About 10 p.m. Saturday night Dr. Madden admitted he could do no more; even though she was no better, she was no worse. She was holding onto life---stronger than we thought, longer than anyone expected. He thought her only chance now was to go by ambulance plane to a specialist. He advised us to call our minister and our parents, though---and that was not a good sign!! When my mother-in-law arrived, she tried to console me saying that God would not send more than we could bear---which I didn't understand and I didn't believe at the time. However, I've come to realize that we can endure more than we think we can and that trials make us stronger.

Arrangements were made for an air ambulance to be sent from Denver to Goodland. We parents could not go on the plane with her, but a private nurse could go. My father and my brother decided to drive Neal and me to the Denver hospital. About 12:15 a.m. we started to Colorado by car. That was early enough that we'd be halfway there (at Limon, CO) at the approximate time Kathi would board the plane at Goodland. We would phone the Goodland hospital from Limon---if she were still alive to board the plane, we would travel on to Denver; if she had died we'd return home.

All the time we were riding in the car toward Limon, it was quiet. I don't know if others were praying, but I was silently praying my selfish prayers. I continued my rebelliousness regarding the possibility of losing my daughter..... "God, don't take her from me!" "I don't want to live without her"; "I won't have any other children if she dies!" After an hour or so, I realized that my selfishness might be causing Kathi's state of "nothingness". Perhaps God was waiting for me to quit threatening him. Perhaps Kathi was suffering longer because of my obstinate, selfish will. "She's suffering so much....poor baby!" It's as if she's in suspension---just waiting. "No better; no worse" the doctor had said---just there. Then I knew I could end her suffering by letting go.... I couldn't keep her life hanging in the balance... It wasn't fair to keep her in this awful state, just because I wouldn't let her go. "And Jesus said unto me, 'My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me." 2 Corinthians 12:9

I considered alternatives: I could live without her; I wouldn't have any more children, but I could let her go if that was God's will. My thoughts & emotions began to ease. Inaudibly, I prayed, "Thy will be done." Immediately, an indescribable peace came over me and I knew everything would be all right...if she lived or died, everything would be all right. I wasn't sure I'd have any more children, but we could, & we would, adjust.

Within five minutes of my prayer of release, we entered Limon, Neal made the call & learned that Kathi had just boarded the plane alive and had revived somewhat as she boarded---the first signs of life for hours and hours. She was en route to Children's Hospital in Denver Colorado! A MIRACLE HAD OCCURRED! My prayer of release & her renewed consciousness must have occurred at the same moment! Her life was spared at the exact moment I'd prayed "Thy Will be done!" "For I will restore health to thee & I will heal your wounds", saith the Lord." Jeremiah 30:17 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all." Psalms 34:19 With extreme relief I silently offered up a prayer of thanks to a loving God. Later, after reading about miraculous healings, I became convinced that this truly was a miracle!! I think it was Norman Vincent Peale who studied and wrote about miracles; he listed certain factors that were always present in cases he believed were truly miracles....they were present in my experience!

Hopefully, you are interested in "the rest of the story..." When we parked outside Children's Hospital, I heard a baby crying & I knew it was Kathi. I told Neal it was Kathi. He said, "Oh, you don't know it's Kathi. This is a children's hospital." I responded, "I know my child's cry!" and I was right.

As we approached the hospital, Mrs. Peters, the nurse who'd flown with Kathi, was leaving. She stopped to talk to us and confirmed that it was Kathi crying---they were doing an IV cut-down on her ankle---which proved to be successful. Mrs. Peters told us, "Unfortunately, the ice bag had melted in the plane so Kathi's fever had soared again." I asked, "How high?" She wouldn't tell me, so I asked "Was it in excess of 106 degrees? The answer was "Yes."

In the hospital, Kathi was in isolation. We could stand at the door & talk to her, but couldn't touch her. It was determined that she had the flu-type Meningitis. (I tell people that flu is very dangerous.) There is more than one type of Meningitis. It's my understanding that it's an inflammation that travels through the spine to the Meninges part of the brain and is caused when one can't overcome another illness, such as flu.

When dismissed after two weeks, Kathi had regressed....was very weak, couldn't walk, was uncoordinated, had lost some physical, mental, & artistic skills, though her memory was good. Her previous patience and goodness had altered. She was easily frustrated, especially when she'd try to draw; she knew she could---but couldn't! In frustration, she'd give up and throw her pencil or crayons down in disgust!

Dr. Barber, her Denver doctor, had told us she had an 18 month recovery period and what remained after that was permanent. At 17 months, we took her again to Denver because she had been having little spells where she'd grab her stomach & complain it hurt; sometimes she'd have a blank look or flutter her eyelids & was unresponsive to directions. Dr. Barber called the attacks Psychomotor Seizures---which is the result of injury.... not hereditary. They reveal themselves in different manifestations. You will realize that, when I describe the changes in Kathi's seizures as she grew.

After her illness, our lives were completely changed. I never understood why it all had to happen, but I know Kathi taught us more love and compassion for others. We still felt close to God---that He was our friend & help in time of need. Her life necessitated a calm routine. I had to keep records of the numbers and times of her seizures; there were several every day. Over the years, we made periodical trips to specialists who'd make changes in her medications. People often didn't understand; sometimes we were ostracized. Kids usually were kind, but adults sometimes were not. When her feelings were hurt by others, I'd console her by explaining that people didn't understand, but God did, and that our relatives understood and loved us.

In Kindergarten, her drawings & writing were unusual. Her teacher was concerned because Kathi's favorite color was black, which was supposed to be bad, and she'd use both hands to make alphabet letters & objects. With her right hand, they were correct; with her left hand, they were opposite. (These were due to the confusion in her brain which had been damaged by the high fever she'd endured.) She did soon outgrow those behaviors. In 1st grade her seizures changed. She'd take off walking with no sensibility of where she was or what she was doing. She didn't respond to anyone talking to her & had to be touched or guided to stop her. That was a very trying time. One time she walked out of the house into the street; another time she walked out of the classroom down the hall unaware the teacher was calling her. I never felt comfortable leaving her alone at all. There were other very trying times during her grade school years: She had many falls & injuries...She fell in music class & broke off her 2 front teeth; she fell against a radiator & received 3rd degree burns which required skin grafting. In 3rd grade she had a schizophrenic teacher who was dismissed before the end of the year. In her teens, a doctor took away an essential medicine and that resulted in more seizures and a concussion. I won't take time to relate all the many situations she, and we, experienced.

In 1962, when Kathi was 7½ years old, Lauri Kay Hill was born and I chose to resign from teaching to be a full-time housewife and mother. Two years later, Jerry Kurtis was born. Kathi loved helping me with their care. In 1964, Goodland Grade School offered two Special Ed classes---one for Neurologically Impaired and one for Mentally Retarded. We allowed Kathi to be placed in the Neurologically Impaired class. She stayed there for grades 4-6. In 1967, because of Goodland refusing to build two new schools that were desperately needed, Neal and I decided there was little future there for three students & two teachers, so we decided to move.

We moved to Ashland in 1967. We had been promised that Kathi's special needs would be met, so we thought that there were Special Ed classes there. There were not! She attended regular classes for a week or two, but was then denied school attendance (except for Phys Ed) because the teacher couldn't handle the seizure scares. After a few months, upon my insistence, Kathi was provided two hours daily education by a tutor. (That was all the law provided.) Through the years Judy Brown, Beverly Gilmore & Mrs. Keasling provided those services. I did much of Kathi's education at home; I also ordered films from the State Dept. & borrowed the local school's projectors when available. Thus, all three of our children watched the films together and played school at home.

During adolescence, Kathi's seizures became more severe. (Remember: a characteristic of Psychomotor Seizures is their varying manifestations.) Her seizures became more like grand mal and were similar to slap-stick comedians who fall straight forward while their feet are still flat on the floor. She still had to have periodic check-ups by specialists, as well as blood tests and medicine adjustments.

She had so many injuries and black eyes! Several Ashland residents asked her about them. She'd respond smiling and saying, "I'd rather fight than switch", a line from a cigarette commercial of that time. (She had a sense of humor and was usually upbeat, in spite of all her problems.) One of the most severe injuries occurred in the spring of our 1st year in Ashland. I was reprimanding her in her bedroom---as explained the situation, I saw "that look" in her eyes and realized she was going into a seizure; I hurried to catch her, but was too late! She fell straight-legged toward her closet door, hit the bottom inset of the door with her broken teeth, cutting out a piece of it which cut her lower lip, and lay there, unresponsive. I smelled the blood and knew I had to get immediate help! I couldn't lift her, there was no ambulance nor EMS service available, I knew few people in this new

residence---and I had two pre-schoolers to consider.... What to do? I thought of a neighbor who lived a block away and called her, requesting help. She ran all the way over to stay with my little ones. Meanwhile, Kathi revived a little, though still dazed, and I was able to walk her to my car. The local hospital personnel provided excellent care and Kathi recovered well. Of course, it was necessary to again take her to the Denver specialist who suggested brain surgery. A brain x-ray was taken, her medication was changed again, and plans were made for the surgery to be done two months later, in August. He planned to scrape off some of the brain cell scar tissue to relieve the distortion of the brain cells which caused the seizures. The doctor advised us that the surgery risks were 50/50; she might be left paralyzed on one side afterwards. We were in shock!

After due consideration, we decided we had to take the risk because her seizures were causing increasingly severe injuries and medications were being exhausted. We reasoned that safety in a wheelchair should be better than risky falls. We went for a check-up in July & I was happy to report that the new (rare) medication was working well—only a few seizures that month. Plans were still on for the brain surgery. In August, we returned to Denver. We had prepared ourselves for the brain surgery. I reported that the medicine was still working well. The doctor reported that he & his team no longer considered doing the surgery. He said the x-ray showed that the scar tissue was thinner, and over a larger area, than he'd anticipated so the risks were too great! He felt the medication was working well enough.

At age 15, Kathi was baptized at the Church of God in Ashland. By the time Kathi was 16, no more tutoring was to be provided. I felt she needed more. She was unhappy knowing that other kids didn't stay home all the time. She had few friends. She wanted to go to college like "Mommy & Daddy". Neal felt that she was our responsibility because God had given her to us, but I finally convinced him that she needed residential schooling where she could continue to learn skills, have some friends, and compete with others like herself and sometimes win. I researched and wrote to every facility in Kansas that might be able to meet her needs, describing her health and problems. I prayed and waited.... "I waited patiently on the Lord and He inclined unto me and heard my cry." Psalms 40:1-2 "... the trying of your faith worketh patience, but in patience have her perfect work..." James 1:3 "We glory in tribulation also knowing that tribulation worketh patience and patience experience and experience hope and hope maketh not ashamed because God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Romans 5:3-5 It took a year for the answer that satisfied me came.

Once she visited Parsons State Training Center, she was anxious to go. It looked like a college campus. It proved to be a wonderful place. Residents were grouped according to their abilities & were housed in cottages. Kathi was placed in the highest functioning cottage. There were nurses on duty 24 hours a day in each cottage, a hospital on the grounds, and educational classes. She could phone us and write letters to us; she felt comfortable there. Whenever she'd come home for a visit, she'd start getting antsy after a week & a half & would want to go back. (Unfortunately, the governor decided these kids should be sent back to their home community, so Parsons and similar facilities were closed. At that time there was no facility near here.)

Ultimately, Homer B. Reed Center in Hays seemed to be the best place, but there were no nurses on duty & no special hospital for these handicapped kids. Kathi lived there about 1½ years in a house with other handicapped adults. On Memorial Day in 1978, the residents were taken to Cedar Bluffs Dam for an "outing" and she drowned. She was 22¾ years old. We were informed of the accident by Sheriff Messer. After my screaming, crying jag, I came to realize that her pain & trials were over. I had known her life was never going to get better. I'd begun to worry about what would happen to her if something happened to both of us parents. I felt God had been with her.... I know she believed in God. I know she was saved. God healed her by taking her. I still picture her rising out of the water with her arms upraised, and God welcoming her into Heaven. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer...Be thou faithful unto death & I will give thee a crown of life." Revelations 2:10 "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Revelations 21:4

The last 8 years of my teaching experience was in Special Ed. Perhaps that is why all this happened. I think I helped many other special kids. I felt I understood the parental emotions and fears, as well as having teacher experience. Perhaps that's why Kathi was sacrificed. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to God's purpose." Romans 8:28

I still consider God and His son my friends. I'd like to read to you the words of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus". *Use a songbook.*

I truly believe the words in that song.. Thank you for listening to my witness Are there any questions?.

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