



Need You Now

A STORY OF HOPE

BY *plumb*

WITH SUSANNA FOTH AUGHTMON

FOREWORD BY AMY GRANT

Foreword

When I closed the last page of Tiffany's book, I wanted to applaud. Against the odds, in the wake of a fractured relationship that had lost all of its luster, hope appeared. Not in the epic stuff of modern storytelling, but in the simplest most profound way, like a seedling that springs up unexpectedly overnight, growing right out of the naked dark soil.

I texted Tiffany immediately.

"I just finished your book! I'm so glad that the gray Sunday afternoon scene in which I'm picturing you includes Solomon Fury, Oliver Canon, Clementine Fire, and Jeremy Lee."

Tiffany and Jeremy Lee had survived the relationship crash that inevitably happens, even on a straight road, when the steering wheel slips a little off center. Is it part of every couple's story that the romantic love that brings them together always falls prey to the weight of the burden of life? When the children we long for, the career goals we work toward, and the beautiful homes we dream of slowly become a reality, does everybody's life unravel?

Mine did.

So why am I, a divorced woman, writing the foreword to this book?

I'm writing it because hope looks different in each of our lives. Hope shows up when we stop hustling for what we think we want and what we think we need and who we think we are and let God have His way. Some of us have to crash and burn before we'll let go. When we finally do, though, we discover with fresh appreciation what God

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has been doing all along throughout our lives—providing unexpected serendipitous moments, directing us across the paths of people who are integral to our journey, and surprising us with experiences and opportunities that we are too timid to even imagine dreaming. This is the road to be on!

And the good news is . . . It's never too late.

Amy Grant
2014

Preface

It is a rare thing to meet someone who is a kindred spirit. Someone who looks at life the same way you do, laughs at the same things, and values the same things. When Tiffany Lee and I met for the first time in the airport in Boise, Idaho, we already knew we had a connection. We had been admirers of each other's work and been friends online. We had texted funny things and encouragements to each other. We had prayed for each other. But when we decided to work together to write Tiffany's story, we knew we needed to spend real time together. A few texts weren't going to cut it. So I flew out to meet up with Tiffany on tour. Sometimes meeting face to face with a long distance friend can be awkward. Or sometimes it can be like you have always known each other and slip into a conversation that you feel like you started a hundred years ago.

We started talking the minute we met. We talked for a day and a night. Then we got on the tour bus for Winter Jam and talked some more. We laughed. We cried. We talked about marriage and kids and poop. (The last two go hand in hand as any mother can tell you.) We talked about joy and heartbreak and redemption. And we talked about the great hope that comes when we trust in the One who loves us most of all.

Tiffany is a rock star. I know this because I have seen her on stage and she has an amazing presence, her voice is incredible, and she wears much cooler shoes than I do. But mostly, Tiffany is Tiffany. She is real.

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She is authentic. She is honest. And she is, in a sense, every woman. She has hopes, dreams, passions, and trouble keeping her house clean. Just like me. Just like you.

And when we sat together, she told me about her awkward moments on stage (which I loved), her roller-coaster ride of a career, and the heartache and triumph of her marriage. It reminded me one more time that we, at our core, are the same. That we are all looking for hope and light and love and healing in the broken places in our lives.

And I think, as you read Tiffany's story, as you are drawn into her journey and root for her in the hard places and cry with her when she is hurt and let out a holler of joy when love comes through, you will realize, that you have also found a kindred spirit. And it doesn't get any better than that.

Susanna Foth Aughtmon
2014

Introduction

Emily Dickinson has a poem that says . . .

*Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops—at all.*

I think Emily knew what she was talking about. Hope. It's a word that fills something in us that moves us toward something better, something richer. It builds us up and urges us to share it. It's the thing that keeps us pushing forward even when it seems like the whole world is against us. And it never stops.

Some people find hope in the beauty that surrounds them. They see it in the pale orange light that hits the sky at sunrise with its promise of a new day, or in the first green of spring poking up through the snow saying that winter has ended. Others see it in the innocence of a newborn baby, curled up in her mother's arms. I love all of these things, but I tend to see hope in the darkest places and in the saddest stories. I think this is because that's where hope shines the brightest: Against the dark backdrop of fear and hurt and despair.

I have always been attracted to the dark. Not in a creepy, weird way, but in a that-can't-be-all-there-is-to-this-story kind of way. If someone is sitting in the dark, I want to find a way to turn on the lights for

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them, and then, while we are at it, throw them a party. When I see someone who is sad, simply put, I want to make them happy. When someone is down, I want to figure out a way to make them laugh. I wanna crack open a jar of joy and see it light them up. I feel drawn to people who are struggling or hurting or lonely.

When I was little, my mom and dad sang in the choir and so they had to sit up on the stage during the service. My brother, who is three years older than me, would sit with his buddies, and my friends and I would sit together, giggling, passing notes . . . but eventually I always found my way to the sixth pew from the front where an elderly gentleman named Roscoe sat by himself each Sunday, silently taking in the service.

Roscoe was in his mid-eighties and a widower. He had an air of aloneness about him that I couldn't bear. He always sat at one end of the pew. I would sit at the other end. Just the two of us. We didn't talk but we were together. Desperately wanting him to know he was not alone, I silently willed him to find for himself the joy that I had inside me. I was hoping for him whether he knew it or not.

All it takes is one tiny moment of hope to lead to the next one and the next one and the next one, until finally you fall into an ocean of hope, so deep and so wide and so all-encompassing you can't figure out how you missed it in the first place. And you think to yourself, I couldn't even see this. I was so blinded by my fears and my hurt and my failures and my pride, that I couldn't see that there is this complete, massive ocean overflowing with hope. I know this because I have experienced it.

My life is just like the life of every human being who has ever walked this planet. It has good and bad and ugly and beautiful all mixed together. But in all of this lovely chaos that is my world, a single thread has woven itself through my life. From my happy childhood to my adolescent panic attacks, from my early Nashville years as a "newbie backup singer goes pro" to my sleep deprived moments of young motherhood . . . all the way to my marriage falling apart, a taut wire has strung the chapters of my life together like colored beads on a

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necklace. It has held me together when I was falling apart and lit up the dark on my loneliest nights.

Hope. It all comes back to hope. It's what strings the story of my life together: The story of dreams and family and love and Mr. Jeremy Lee. The story of IBS and depression and ADD. The story of written songs and three babies and a band and a shelved record. The story of an incredibly broken heart, a weathered storm, and a true, life-changing miracle.

Hope is the brightest word in the universe. It is the expectation that life, even though it's crazy or dark at the moment, can shift. That one tiny pinpoint of light can pierce the overwhelming sadness and break everything open with its joy. It's what we all want when we are hurting or full of doubt or heartbroken. We want some hope. I have a tank full of hope. I'm overflowing with it. Maybe it's because hope has saved me more than once. Maybe it's because it's saving me still. Hope is oxygen . . . and we all need to breathe. And my greatest wish for you, as you read my story, is that you will know this truth. No matter where you are, no matter who you are, no matter what you have done, no matter how dark your night, there is always hope.



Chapter 1

Hi, My Name is Tiffany

THERE IS NOTHING quite like standing on an outdoor stage with the summer sun beating down on you, singing your heart out, and feeling the crowd respond to you. Feet planted, heart pounding, everything you feel, everything you know, everything you care about is focused in the moment. You are connected.

Everything you were created to be is filling the air as you sing, pouring back out over the crowd. You see the expressions of emotion on the faces of the fans as they sing with you, fists in the air, shouting to the sky. Then there are those other faces, the ones with their eyes closed, arms raised, mouthing the words, as tears wet their cheeks. They are lost in the song. What an incredible raw moment to share.

In the best moments, you lose sense of the crowd altogether, and a song becomes a very personal, spiritual expression. You let go of your agenda, your ego, your worries about how flabby your upper arms look on the jumbotron, and your concerns about the weird echo in your ear monitors that happened during sound check.

It's not about you. It's about something so much bigger that you're

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simply a messenger. Singing center stage is no longer just a good show. It's a sacred moment. It's exhilarating. Intense. Beautiful. Heart wrenching. It's the very thing that makes everything you do worth it.

Sometimes you can't help yourself and you give into the moment. Climbing up on the drum riser, drenched in sweat, you catapult yourself into the air in an excited jump. You are one with the crowd. Your heart is racing. You kick your legs high. And in a heart-dropping moment, you feel your favorite vintage red velvet pants split wide open—and then a quick realization as the summer breeze wafts over you that you may or may not have decided to forego undergarments with these particular pants since panty lines are not a good look on stage. There is that. In a space of six seconds, you are no longer one with the fans or a respected artist, you are just a girl with the wind blowing where your inseam should be. This can make it difficult to concentrate on singing or connecting or, well, anything really. Mostly, you just wish you could blink your eyes like a genie and be anywhere but where you are in that moment.

You get weird looks from your band as you finish the next *three songs* sitting with your legs crossed on the drum riser.

“She's still sitting!” their eyes are saying. “She's still sitting!”

But the show must go on, blown out pants or not. Finally, there is that humbling moment when you finish your set and realize that a respected fellow artist has seen everything, *everything* . . . and in his spontaneous kindness, he has brought a large towel to cover your shame so you can exit with a little dignity to the green room. Life is like that: Joy. Amazing highs. Fantastic surprises. Unexpected moments. Embarrassment. Unbelievable lows. And blown-out pants all wrapped into one.

At least, my life is like that.

Hi, my name is Tiffany Lee, or as most of you know me, Plumb. I sing and write songs and have had more than my share of awkward moments on stage. I didn't plan on being a rock star . . . or a songwriter . . . or a performer. But the love of music and the joy of singing were woven into my DNA while I was still in the womb. It's who I am.

As long as I can remember, I have been singing. As I said, my

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parents both sang in the church choir while I was growing up. And although neither one of them would claim to be a great vocalist, Mom and Dad have always loved music and singing. My dad spent his days working different shifts for Delta Airlines, but he would wake us in the morning singing a made-up “Good Morning” song or one of the many little diddies he has been known to write while out on the lawnmower. A stay-at-home mom, my mom always referred to herself as a “domestic goddess.” In our cozy house in Indianapolis, this Domestic Goddess was also a bona fide DJ. My mom washed dishes with Elvis on vinyl in the background. He shared the stage with the smooth sounds of Johnny Mathis and the raspy voice of Stevie Nicks. Every time I hear a Fleetwood Mac song, I am transported back to road trips in my mom’s orange Chevette with the tan pleather interior. Windows down, curls whipping in the breeze, we belted out the songs together. I am convinced that the cassette player in that Chevette would only play Fleetwood Mac.

My older brother remembers those road trips less fondly. While quick to acknowledge my burgeoning talent, he considered me to be the musical thorn in his side. Even though I stayed over on my side of the line, or the “hump” as we called it, in the back seat of the Chevette, my vocal stylings did not. The sound of my voice filling the car and bouncing off the windows seemed to grate on his nerves. Or maybe it was the constancy of my singing. The fact that no matter where I was or what was going on, I was singing.

I just couldn’t help myself. As I would sing along happily to whatever song was on the radio, he would beg my parents, “Please, p-l-e-a-s-e . . . make Tiffany stop singing.”

I, personally, loved my singing. My parents, if anything, encouraged me. So my brother was left to his own devices when it came to trying to get me to stop. He was patient; I have to give him that. My absolute favorite toy as a child was our family tape recorder. I still have it. I loved to record myself. I entertained myself . . . with myself. I would record myself singing and then I would listen to the recording, rewind it, and tape over it with something else. I never saved anything;

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I just liked to hear my recorded voice. (My best friend, Melis, will tell you that not much has changed in that regard.)

Anyway, one night my brother got a hold of the tape recorder, which he strategically placed just in time for dinner. In between passing the green beans and the fake instant mashed potatoes my mom always tried to convince us were just like real potatoes, my brother stretched his big ole' toe under the table and pushed, Play.

My voice erupted from below, yielding an awkward silence at our dinner table. My brother was triumphant. I was horrified. Those recordings were personal. Private. Not meant to be shared. I made a general disclaimer to the table, "I was just talking to myself." My parents were sympathetic. Brother got in trouble for embarrassing me. I ended the night triumphant.

Besides giving us a solid foundation of great music in our home, my parents gave us a solid foundation of Jesus. It isn't a stretch to see the marriage of those two things continuing on in my life even now. My passions for music and songwriting flow out of my passion for loving and following Jesus. I don't remember a time in my childhood when His presence wasn't felt or mentioned or referenced.

My dad came from a very strict, conservative Christian family. My mom came from a very loving and accepting non-Christian home. Our family was a mash-up of these views and traits. In our home, church life was central. Sunday was the Sabbath, the Lord's day, a day for Bible lessons, familiar hymns, and being with friends. Yes, I was raised with solid values, my mom's delicious fried chicken, and Jesus. If we weren't at home, you would usually find us at church or the thrift store. My mom and I love thrift stores.

I have an early memory of me standing on the stage of Southwest Church of the Nazarene in Indianapolis, Indiana. I am all of three years old. A microphone in my hands, I am dressed to kill in ruffles and tights with hair curling into ringlets about my face. I am singing a duet with my dad. I come up about mid-thigh on his polyester slacks. I am not afraid. I'm not nervous. I am happy. My mom sits in the congregation beaming; the infamous family recorder is on her lap taping my first live

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performance. My dad is beyond proud. Unbeknownst to me, he has told the soundman to cut his voice in the mains when it gets to the chorus, the part I know best. I can hear his strong baritone voice singing with me in the monitor, but all that the congregation hears come chorus time is my high warbling toddler notes as I belt out the words:

*It reaches to the highest mountain
It flows to the lowest valley
The blood that gives me strength from day to day
It will never lose its power.*

I still remember the powerful feelings of that moment, the swelling of the music in the sanctuary. The warmth and safety of my dad near me. The smiles on the faces of the people before us. Something big was taking place. This was joy. Plain and simple. The import wasn't lost on me, and I can recall that tiny girl thinking, I *really* like doing this.

J.D., an elderly man with lots of freckles and a big smile, approached me after the church service. Bending down so he could speak to me eye to eye, he said, "I hope you sing every Sunday. That made me so happy. That brought me so much joy." The truth of what he said showed in his face, the way it lit up and his eyes crinkled around the sides. And I believed him. I remember thinking that day that I wanted to make people feel like that for the rest of my life, whether it was singing or telling a joke, or giving a hug. In that moment, without realizing it, I found my thing. It wasn't necessarily singing. It wasn't necessarily being in front of a crowd. It was making people happy. I wanted to make people laugh. I wanted to give people joy. I wanted people to feel the way that J.D. felt.

I may not have understood the blood theology that I was singing about, the message that made J.D. so happy or that made my mom choke up that morning, but I knew that I liked Jesus and Jesus liked me. Knowing that was more than enough for me.

As for the understanding of all that Jesus had done, and would do, for me in my life, well, that would come later in a thousand different

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big and small ways. The foundation that my parents laid for me so carefully as a child became my anchor as an adult. As I have grown and changed, so has my relationship with Jesus and my understanding of who he is and how he loves me. He doesn't need me. He *wants* me. He doesn't need me to love him. He wants me to love him. No matter what I have done or not done. No matter how many mistakes I make or how many times I get it right or wrong. He just loves me. No matter what. It's just like I say to my children before I shut off the light at bedtime, "I love you. Always. Forever. No matter what. More than all the dust on the moon."

My relationship with Him is not about the dos and don'ts that I embraced as a child. It is simply about responding to His love for me in a way that never wavers. It is my bedrock. It is the thing that every other part of my life hinges upon: my music, my friendships, my marriage, my love for my children, and my parenting, but also the way I treat the cashier or the server or the person who hurts me. In Him is my true home, where my identity is found.

What my parents gave me, and what I found in church that day as a three-year-old, helped carve out a path for me to walk on as I grew up. What I wouldn't know for years is that a time would come in my life when everything I ever thought I knew to be true would be tested and shaken, leaving me clinging to the single truth I sang about that day as a tiny girl in ruffle butt tights: His power alone sustains me. His power alone gives me hope.

He would hold me at my highest peaks and sustain me in my lowest valleys. And He would ground me when things that were going very right, suddenly, went very wrong. Life at its best is unpredictable. In the years following the vintage red velvet pants catastrophe, I would find out just how unpredictable it could be.



Chapter 2

Joy is a Choice

GETTING TO LIVE out the dream of doing what I love—what I was born to do—is the best. Any musician will tell you the same. But living on a tour bus for several weeks straight or many months out of the year can be an adjustment.

A nice tour bus sleeps twelve people in four rows of three bunks each. This makes for close quarters. If you're not already close to your band members before you go on tour, you will definitely be close to them after spending week after week seeing them in what they call their "pajamas," eyes bloodshot from late nights, going through their unusual bedtime routines, or brandishing their distinct brand of "morning breath." You really do become a family.

After a late concert, everyone loads on the bus to wind down and wait. After tearing down from the night's event, the crew is packing equipment on the trailers behind the bus. Energy runs high, and, if you're lucky, warm bus food is waiting. Bus food is both fantastic and horrible all at the same time. Fantastic, because you are starving after a show. Horrible, because hot wings can be deadly at midnight. People

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chat, eat, laugh, and eventually slip off to their bunks. I always try to call dibs on a bottom bunk. Climbing into a top bunk requires you to get in your bed without stepping on someone's face as you use their bunk to launch yourself into your own.

Each bunk has its own heavy pleather privacy curtain so no one can see you drool on your pillow while sleeping. Once secure in your cubbyhole for the night, you have a little electrical station above your head to plug in your phone or tablet as well as a low light for nighttime reading. Sleeping on a tour bus can be fun. It's like summer camp on wheels. You and all your friends get to have a sleepover. Once tucked in you can say good night like the Waltons (we add nicknames on our bus), "Good night, Carp." "Good night, Jimmy Dog." "Good night, Giffy." "Good night, Tricky," and so on. Or you can simply put your headphones on, zone out, and surrender to the hum of the engine and its gentle vibrations rocking you to sleep like a soothing lullaby. It's cozy.

Unless someone closes your pleather curtain all the way, enclosing you in a space roughly the size of a casket. Then if you're me, you might panic a little. I need a good foot of open curtain space so that I can breathe in and out and feel the glow of the low light of the hallway on my face. I like to say that it helps me dream good dreams about the hot guy I'm married to and the cute little kids I get to see when the bus pulls into Nashville the next morning. No single thought brings me more joy than thinking about those sweet faces. Four unique kinds of joy: Jeremy Lee, Solomon, Oliver, and Clementine. My heart is full.

Life as a wife and mom on the road is an adventure, but I think I have always thought of life as an adventure. To me, joy and adventure go together. I have always been excited for the next fun thing, the next delicious treat, the next big gig, even the next year to arrive. As a preschooler, I once tried to convince my mom that I was four years old, through the door of the bathroom in our quaint little red brick ranch house.

"I'm four."

"No, you are three still."

"No, I'm four."

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“No, you are three,” my mother said, firmly.

“Well, I’m almost four.”

There was a long pause on the other side of the door before Mom conceded, “Well, you are almost four, but make sure you always tell the truth, because you’re actually still three.”

I may have been only three years old to my mom, but in my mind I had already been there and done three. The day after I turned three, I considered myself almost four. Maybe it was because I was the baby in the family, or maybe I just got excited about what was coming next. Probably it was a little of both.

Being the baby in my family and the youngest granddaughter (one grandson younger than me on each side) definitely had its perks. My mom comes from a family of eight kids and my dad comes from a family of six. I have scads of older cousins. Every family reunion, every holiday, every gathering is something to anticipate because even in my childish heart I recognized that my relatives were excited to see me. They grounded me in their love. They made me feel special. It is that eternal gift for which every child, every person longs. How can you not see life as a fun adventure, how can you not sense joy everywhere you go, when you are surrounded by people who love you?

My Great Uncle Rueben always called me, “The Boss.” When I would walk in the door, his eyes would light up and he would announce, “Well, here’s the Boss.” There was something about me that was contagious to him. And there was something about him that was contagious to me. He couldn’t get enough of me and I couldn’t get enough of him, or his gigantic pillow belly.

Tucking my small hand in his calloused palm, we would walk out behind his house to the cornfield. Slipping between the rows, we would fill a basket with ears of sun-warmed corn. His wife, my Great Aunt Mae, would let me help shuck the corn, and then she would boil it in a large silver pot. The cobs would drop into the scalding water firm and come out sweet and soft. We ate them dripping with butter. They tasted like candy.

I remember thinking, This is the good stuff. Shucking sweet corn.

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A house full of cousins. Hugs and kisses from my aunt and uncle. This is it! I would leave their home feeling rich and full.

My mom once took me aside when I was older and, with an arm around my shoulders, said, “Don’t take it lightly that you bring joy to people. I almost named you ‘Joy’ because I just liked the name. Sometimes I wonder if that’s what I should have named you. You bring joy to others; don’t ever stop doing that.”

She was probably being a little dramatic because she almost named me Monica, too, but she was right: I was a joyful kid. Maybe she breathed prayers of joy over me when I was in her belly. Maybe she just encouraged it in me along the way. Wherever it came from, if I could find a way to give anyone around me some of that joy I carried inside, I would. It was what motivated me in church, in school, and with my family. It motivated me in my friendships, too.

One of my best friends in elementary school came from a broken home. It wasn’t something we ever talked much about; it just was. She lived with her mom. She didn’t know her dad. And I couldn’t stand it. I felt like if there was some way I could tuck her into the folds of my family, I could fill up the hole that had to be in her heart. I wanted her to have what I had. I wanted her to feel the safety, the wholeness, the sense of stability that I had. I had my full share of joy and I wanted her to have her full share, too.

But in recent years, I have learned a few things about joy. It isn’t something you can hand off to someone else. It exists independent of whether you have one parent at home or two. And it isn’t happiness. Happiness is circumstantial. Happiness is that feel good emotion we all love. A lot of things make me happy: Root beer. Coconut. Chocolate. Black Licorice. Coffee. Hot herbal tea. Massages. Shoes. Romantic comedies. And good old-fashioned fart jokes, to name just a few.

Happiness, at best, is a quick fix. It is a momentary pleasure. It always has a beginning and an end. It’s not that I don’t love being happy. I adore it. I would love to be happy every single minute of every single day for the rest of my life, but I have found in my long lonely nights when one simple spark of happiness cannot be found, joy is still there.

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Joy can light a path in the dark. It can weave its way into a broken heart and strengthen a weary spirit. Joy and hope are best friends. They are hand-holding friends. You can't have one without the other.

This is because joy is not an emotion. Joy is a choice.

Joy is not simply a response to something fun or life-giving or exciting. It is an attitude that we can embrace whether life is easy or hard. Good or bad. Funny or tragic. I love how Kay Warren puts it in her book *Choose Joy: Because Happiness Isn't Enough*. She says, Joy is the settled assurance that God is in control of all the details of my life, the quiet confidence that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and the determined choice to praise God in every situation. Hope is something that is birthed out of joy. If I truly believe that God is in control of the details of my life, if I really understand that ultimately everything is going to be all right, and if I choose to praise God in every situation, a space opens up in my soul that allows me to dream, to pray, to hope. I have joy, so therefore I can hope. Once you have hope, the sky is the limit.

I could have used Kay Warren's kind of joy in junior high school. Junior high has a way of sucking joy out of the most resilient of children. When I was eight, we moved to Fayetteville, Georgia. My dad was transferred by Delta, and we were very settled into the community by the time seventh grade hit. But somewhere in the mash-up of changing classes, lockers, premenstrual hormonal upheaval, and the sheer terror of dressing down for PE, my sense of calm and my love-filled childhood gave way to paralyzing anxiety, anxiety that would lay me out flat and leave me gasping for breath, desperate for hope like never before. It crowded out the easy peace and security that had filled my early years. And it didn't leave a lot of room for hope. Every time a panic attack hit, it squeezed out, literally, any thought of hope. I felt as if I were going to die. And joy, well, joy flew out the window.