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D I A N N E

I am well aware that people will only spend a certain amount of time reading as they search websites. For that reason, I will try to be brief. But, if you are considering utilizing the Secrets material, I feel it important that you know the person behind the ministry.

I was born in Youngstown, Ohio. My parents moved to Nashville, Tennessee, when I was one year of age. At the time, my parents had three babies under the age of three. Eight years later, a baby sister joined our family. My dad pursued his undergraduate degree in Nashville, while working two jobs. Both went on to attain several graduate degrees and become college professors and the head of their departments of study.

When I was fifteen, I had a crush on a young man, Mark Dougharty, who attended the college where my parents were employed. I did not think I had a chance with this very handsome twenty year old young man. After all, he had a campus full of young women closer to his age to choose from, why would he be interested in a “kid” five years younger than him? The word got out that I was interested in Mark, and one night after a basketball game, he asked if he could drive me home. Of course, I said, “Yes!” The rest is history. Two years later, we married on July 19, 1973, just eight weeks after his graduation from college and mine from High School.

The day after we married, we left Nashville to pursue Mark’s graduate degree. In 1975, we moved back to Nashville where Mark began a sales career with New England Life Insurance Company. Our oldest daughter, Angela, was born there in 1976. When she was four, we moved to Boston where Mark had accepted a position within the company’s home office. While in Boston, our second daughter, Kelly, was born in 1981.

Two years later, Mark was given an agency in Houston, Texas. He was one of only two young men within the company to acquire such a large agency. Mark was under a great deal of pressure to continue to grow the business and to prove himself worthy of the position he had been given. Much of his time was spent recruiting salesman, which meant on the weekends he was playing golf, tennis, and socializing with them in order to convince them to join his agency.

During the first eleven years of our marriage, and especially our five years in Houston, we began to grow apart emotionally. Mark wanted to be seen as successful; to prove himself worthy of the job. Therefore, he ran hard after the world and away from God and his family.

We had both grown up attending church. The denomination in which our families were members was very legalistic. Growing up, we had many denominational rules. As we became adults, it was apparent to us that we would never be able to keep all the rules, we could never be “good enough,” so why try? While in Houston, our church attendance became sporadic, and most of our friends were not born again believers.

In the spring of 1984, we were invited to a company awards event in Switzerland. Mark had been nominated for a top award. We were so excited about attending, and he was especially excited to have been nominated. The big night came and we arrived in our brand new evening attire all ready to be acknowledged. As they called out the sales statistics for the winner, Mark leaned over and said, “I think they are wrong on some of our numbers.” Well, they had the right numbers, just the wrong guy! He did not receive the award that night, and disappointment gripped us both. He wanted to be acknowledged by his peers for a job well done. I wanted him to be acknowledged because I felt that I had sacrificed the most in his pursuit to be at the top of the company—it was my reward as well!

The following week, we traveled across Switzerland and Germany. Our time there was not only miserable due to the cold damp weather, but due to the “dark cloud” of disappointment that hung over each of us. The Saturday following our trip, Mark was invited to an all-day Bible Study by a gentleman who was the top salesman in Houston. Reluctantly, he agreed to attend. His motivation was strictly the possibility of recruiting this gentleman into his agency, in order to make Mark even more successful.

As he sat in the large hotel ballroom that day listening to the Word of God being read, he became convicted about the way in which he was living his life. The gentleman reading scripture that day ended with the verses from John 15 on the vine and the branches. I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. Although under conviction, Mark felt fairly certain that an invitation would not be given. After all, this was a hotel ballroom, not a church sanctuary. God had other plans, though, and the speaker gave a gospel invitation to the group. He tried to ignore the Holy Spirit’s promptings to go forward and give his heart and life to Christ. Years later when giving his testimony, he would often say that he would have run through a brick wall to go forward that day. He actually did run through a spiritual “brick wall” that Satan had built around his heart. As the invitation was given, he quickly made his way forward. His decision that day to accept Christ as his Lord changed the trajectory of our marriage, home, and lives.

Mark began to read God's Word night after night. He was like a dry sponge soaking in the Word. He was a changed man. I liked this new husband, after all I thought the problems we were having were all his—certainly not mine! But month after month, the light from Mark's new found faith began to reveal the darkness in my own life. In June of that year, we were invited to a Christian concert. Mark had been attending a weekly Bible study and those attending with him invited us to the concert. To be honest, I did not want to go. For months, I had had a ticket for that very weekend to return to Nashville for my 10th High School reunion. But for some reason, unbeknownst to me at the time, I decided to forgo the reunion and stay in Houston to attend the concert.

On that very night, seated next to Mark, I accepted Christ as my Savior. I waited until we were home and in bed to reveal to him that I had given my life to Christ. It seemed "safer" to acknowledge my decision in the darkness of our room. He turned to me and said, "I knew you gave your heart and life to Christ because your countenance was totally different after the concert than it was before the concert." For the first time, that night the verse in Genesis that says...and they shall become one flesh, became a reality in our marriage. Our decisions to accept Christ as Lord united us as one flesh and changed the trajectory of our lives.

Four years later, in 1988, God moved us to Memphis, Tennessee, where Mark would assume the position as General Agent in a New England Life Insurance agency. The move placed us in the middle between his family in Oklahoma and mine in Nashville. We quickly settled into the community and Mark's business began to grow. After five years, Mark was experiencing a sense of unsettledness in his spirit. God was stirring his heart for ministry. In college, he had felt God calling him into full-time vocational ministry, but he ran from the calling. Now God was reigniting that flame.

Mark had a passion for missions, so he began to work on a Master's degree in Missions through Columbia Bible College. At the same time, the business was seeing great success, yet Mark's heart was being drawn toward missions. In the summer of 1992, he was asked by our church to lead a mission trip to Mongolia. The country had recently been released from communist rule, grocery stores were empty and the Mongolian people in need of all of life's necessities. The atmosphere was ripe for the gospel. I don't have time and space to describe his trip, but trust me when I say it was horrendous and that he almost did not make it back to the United States.

Once home from Mongolia, Mark entered our kitchen where on the refrigerator had been a magnet that read: Anytime Anywhere at Any Cost. He promptly removed the magnet turning to me and saying, "I am not worthy nor am I ready to be a missionary." In the days and months to follow, he returned to growing his business, trusting that if God wanted him in full-time vocational ministry, he would open the right door.

Two years later, God did open a door, and after twenty-three years in business, Mark entered full-time vocational ministry, joining our church staff. I struggled with being in ministry. It was a huge financial sacrifice and Mark had invested twenty-three years building his resume and business, just to walk away. But he was at peace with the decision, and over time, I came to see that we were where God desired for us to be.

Mark described his daily routine that first year on ministry as someone trying to drink from a fire hydrant. The world and information he needed to retain were so vast and different from his years in business, and they were coming at him at a rapid pace. He finally settled in and became comfortable with his ministry responsibilities. About that time, our pastor of over 30 years was contemplating retirement. He fluctuated back and forth for over two years. Mark and the pastor's family were the only ones who were aware of this. Those months were stressful as Mark and the staff could not move forward, church life and ministry were on hold. Finally, our pastor was ready to make the announcement of his retirement. A search committee was formed and they moved forward in seeking the right man for the office of pastor. One year later, a pastor was called and accepted the call.

There was excitement in the air upon his coming but there was also a sense of turmoil as those opposing him began to make their feelings known. A blog, which was a new form of communication in the electronic world, was started to oppose the new pastor, his wife, and eventually focused its aim on Mark. This went on for two years. The congregation was split between those who supported the new pastor and those who did not. Our church became the focus of the nightly news on the local television channels. Some controversial issues with ministry staff surfaced, which brought even more local media attention to the church. It was an incredibly stressful time. At the end of our new pastor's second year, Mark and I were struggling over whether he should stay on the church staff or step down. We sought out-of-town counsel and prayed intently as to what God would have us to do. Finally, in May of 2007, we felt at peace about stepping down. On Mother's Day, we stood before the church and gave our resignation.

There was a great sense of relief yet we were also experiencing some anxiety in not knowing what was ahead. Would Mark be able to secure a secular job or a ministry job? How long would it take? Did we have enough money to see us through until he could secure a job? Just prior to stepping down, Mark began to experience issues with his balance. He kept it to himself until that September when he had his yearly physical. Once his exam was completed and his doctor declared him healthy, he shared with his doctor the struggle he had with negotiating stairs and how he had fallen a few months prior while jogging.

His doctor ordered a C-scan for the following week. Once the results were in, we were told that Mark had Cerebellum Atrophy, a pre-mature shrinking of the cerebellum at the base of the brain. The news was shocking, as we had never heard of the disease and were uncertain as to what to expect in the future. In the weeks to follow, we researched Cerebellum Atrophy and tried to take it all in stride with Mark continuing to send out hundreds of resumes in an attempt to find a job.

Nine months later, with no job and no prospects of a job, we went to Mayo Clinic for a clearer understanding of the disease and a hope that they would tell us he had been misdiagnosed, but that is not what happened. The Mayo doctors were certain he had Cerebellum Atrophy and even more certain that he had Multiple Systems Atrophy, a much more invasive neurological disease. The news was devastating. With this diagnosis and no job, we returned home and placed our house on the market. Three months later, it sold and we had two weeks to find a home to rent and move. God provided a rental in a totally different part of town, but we did not care; we were desperate for a place to live. There in that little ranch house, God began his refining work in our lives. Thus our wilderness journey began.

Over the next five and a half years and five moves, God would teach us about surrender, His faithfulness, His ability to provide, His goodness, His unconditional love, and he would strip us of all we thought, prior to Mark's illness, was important. God would "whittle" us down, stripping away who we once were and creating something new and beautiful. In the midst of the suffering and loneliness, God would also bring about this discipling ministry, Secrets Savored—only God!

After five and a half years of moving, God provided a home for us where Mark was able to live comfortably. He spent the last two years of his life in a hospital bed in our home. I had the privilege of caring for him, and those last two years were some of the sweetest of our forty-five years of marriage. On July 31st, 2018, Mark left this earth peaceably, not at all what the doctors had predicted, but God was gracious.

He was my biggest fan and would not let me quit the Secrets Savored ministry, God had divinely given me, even though I threatened to do so many times those first few years. One day when I was discouraged about the ministry, in his weakened voice he said, "Dianne, is this your ministry or God's ministry?" I reluctantly answered, "It is God's ministry." To which he responded, "Well then, you cannot quit." So, I continue on. What an unexpected gift, blessing, and privilege Secrets has been to me.

Being a widow, living without my very best friend on this earth and my soulmate is difficult and often lonely, but God is faithful to his Word: I will never leave you or forsake you. He is there when I lay my head on my pillow at night, his presence fills my room as I sleep, and he is there to greet me each and every morning. Oh how faithful he is!

I am thankful for this ministry, for a husband who saw that I was called to do this and would not let me quit, but cheered me on. I am thankful that God is the author of my story and that he knew what was best for me.

Blessings!

Dianne