

*When God heals,
He does not take the healing back.*

*I will not forget you.
I have held you
in the palm of my hand.*

Isaiah 49:15-16

Ask and You Shall Receive™



A Miracle for Steven

Karen Vincent Zizzo

Enlighten Publishing

“Waking up to what is already present.”

Ancaster, Ontario, Canada

Ask and You Shall Receive: A Miracle for Steven

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The statements made and opinions expressed are the personal observations and assessments of the author based on her own experience and were not intended to imply a course of action for those experiencing disease or illness, or to guarantee success for those who decide to use this method. It is also not meant to prejudice any party. Every effort has been made to make this book as complete and as accurate as possible. All identifying names of doctors, hospitals, and non-family caregivers have been removed.

I dedicate this book
to all of those who want to believe in
The Power of Prayer.

May this story give you the Hope and the Faith to believe that
prayer is a powerful force, and that God is there for all of us.

“Ask and you shall receive.”
You don’t always receive what you ask for;
the gift may be in recognizing “what” you receive.
Anyone can ask.
God is the God of the impossible.
Miracles do happen.

Miracle:

...an extraordinary and welcome event
that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws,
attributed to a divine agency.

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary, 10th Edition, Oxford University Press.*

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Forewords

“The Age of Miracles”

We now live in an age of “scientific miracles”. Our spacecraft have landed on the moon and Mars and have explored the neighbourhoods of Jupiter and Saturn. Our communication systems allow worldwide instantaneous information transfer via internet. Our physicians can transplant organs, perform surgery that only the microscope can see, can map the entire human genome and cure genetic disorders through gene therapies and biological drugs, and medicine and science are advancing so quickly that textbooks are always out of date by the time they are printed. It seems at times that all of the secrets of nature are being unlocked and that even life itself will soon not be a mystery.

So, are miracles out of date? Do we need miracles? Should a well-informed and thoughtful person give miracles any credence?

There is a striking passage in the Gospels of Mark and of Matthew. Jesus had achieved fame as a healer and miracle-worker, but when he returned to his own home, Nazareth, among people who had known him or were his relatives, “... he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith (Matt. 13:58).”

Herein lies the important distinction. Modern “scientific miracles” have no mystery, are limited by her own perspectives, science, and powers, and do not put us in touch with something greater than ourselves. This book instead is a testimony of faith, showing how the faith of this family, and faith-community had an encounter with the providence of God, with the result that their collective faith was further increased, and the sense of the presence of God in the lives of the whole community and his family were graciously strengthened. Note that it is not only the reversal of the disease that is important, but there must be openness to see

the hand of God in it all. One can imagine a situation in which a person with a disease might later be reported healthy, and the conclusion may be “spontaneous remission” or “wrong diagnosis”, with no benefit in the lives of those affected. It is not the size of the miracle of healing that counts, but the openness to see that God wants to be present in our lives, and a family and a community can be drawn closer to God through becoming aware again of His providence and living power for those who are willing to have faith enough to perceive God's hand in our lives' events.

Eldon Tunks, M.D. FRCP(C)

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“An Example of Asking and Receiving”

I am a true believer that we meet the right people at the right time to get the things done that God feels need to be done. I met Karen Zizzo at a business meeting. The subject of the meeting was not powerful in either of our minds, but we had come to the meeting because someone else thought that we should meet. We both had this overwhelming feeling that we should be there and had even reorganized our schedules so that we could attend. As it turned out, we were not there to talk about the business, but we did need to meet.

I looked across the table and asked Karen, “What do you feel passionately about?” She replied, “I have a book I need to publish.” Without hesitation I said, “I can help you with that.” I had just completed three years of research to find a publisher and learned about getting my own book published. I had the answers she needed.

A few days earlier, Karen had asked God for His help. She had prayed, “Dear Lord, I need Your help. I want to get this book finished and published, but I need an editor and a publisher that can help me get the finished product. If it is Your will to have this book finished too, please send me that help.” Forty-eight hours later we were sitting at the table across from each other and I had asked the right question. This book, *Ask and You Shall Receive: A Miracle for Steven*, was completed because of her prayer.

I truly believe that those who read this book will be given strength in their own lives. After reading about the situation that shook the Zizzo family to their very foundations, people will be inspired. It will amaze many how an unflinching belief in the power of prayer and an all-consuming love brought them through

this frightening period. Regardless of what you face in life—obstacles, challenges, disappointments, or emotional and physical pain—you will have insight into the power of prayer, and the power of the outpouring of love and concern from everyone around you.

In the pages of this book, Karen and her family have courageously shared their story. They have returned to the past and dredged up all of the emotions and realities of that painful period in their lives so that through their words, through this book, they can help others. I encourage you to read it with an open mind and heart. I am extremely proud to have been a part of the project. Like everyone who reads it, I have been given renewed faith, greater hope, and a strength that comes from believing again in the power of prayer.

Judy Suke

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Preface

*Years of experience,
plus knowledge,
plus reflection,
equals WISDOM*

The experience within these pages happened in 1987 ...it is now 2004.

I have to begin by explaining the two main reasons why it took me so long to write this book.

Number One: I needed years of reflection to share exactly what happened. It is said that years of experience, plus knowledge, plus reflection, equals wisdom. Hopefully, I have acquired some wisdom over the years. I feel I have.

Number Two: Throughout the years, there were times that I was asked to put our experience to paper. I could not write the story while Steven, our oldest son, was young and still growing up. I did not want him to be adversely affected by people seeking him out as “the miracle boy.” I wanted his youth to be as normal as possible.

He is now twenty-five years old and in medical school in Australia. He understands that something powerful happened and even has encouraged me to tell the story. He realizes that it may help others and give them hope.

Some real soul-searching had to be done as to whether our family should share this very personal account of Steven’s serious medical ordeal. Our final decision was based on a need to show

our gratitude, and our heartfelt desire to give hope to others.

As we began to share our story, many people asked us why we allowed such an invasion of our family’s privacy. They also warned that people would be skeptical of our story. Was it a misdiagnosis? Or, was it a miracle—a miracle resulting from divine intervention created by the power of prayer?

You will see, as events unfold in the story, that something was happening that could not be explained. Our family experienced the loving and focused power of prayer, and we are eternally grateful. It was through the Scripture, “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” [John 16:24] that we were guided to trust in a positive outcome. Making our public request for prayer ensured that the power was spread over many people earnestly focusing their thoughts and energy on our son Steven, and on all of us as a family. God is the God of the impossible and He enlightened many to the powerful force of prayer during that time.

Even though we sometimes felt like saying “No” when invited to tell our story, something inside us wouldn’t let us do that. Something miraculous happened and it is almost as though that unbelievable time in our lives must be shared. We even feel a responsibility to tell others.

My husband, Richard, and I both agree that telling this story blesses us over and over again. As you are reading this, we are similarly blessed. Others tell us that they also feel blessed in hearing the story.

It is our desire to share this story with the intention of bringing you closer to experiencing your own Hope, Faith, Trust, and Love in God. May this story give you the Hope and the Faith to believe that prayer is a powerful force, and that God is there for all of us.

Acknowledgements

I want to say a heartfelt thank you to those who have contributed to make this book possible.

To my husband, Richard, whose inspiration, unconditional support, and love motivated me to reach for my dream of finishing this book. I thank you for your generosity of spirit, collaborating with me, and allowing me to candidly tell our personal story.

To my children, Steven, Laura, and Ryan, for your constant inspiration, support, and understanding. Thank you for being who you are. You always encouraged me and pushed me to finish the book. You would say, “Just do it.” I want you to know how proud I am of all of you and your accomplishments, and that I love you dearly.

To my loving extended family, who encouraged me, and cheered me on. Thank you to all of you. You were so much a part of this story. Your love, support, and prayers were a constant, and always are. I want you to know how much you are appreciated and loved.

To the many friends, who made suggestions, offered prayers, and shared stories, I thank you for your encouragement. I truly value our friendship.

To my gifted manuscript developer, Judy Suke, who helped me focus, commit to regular times to work, and get this book finished. Thank you for your personal commitment to my project. “Focus and finish,” were words I needed to hear. You made the writing process fun.

To Manisha Solomon, of Solotext Editorial, thank you for your candid suggestions and for your competent organizational skills in completing this project. Your knowledge and connections were invaluable.

To Sharon Buzelli, thank you for helping me get the first draft together. Every journey begins with the first step.

I especially offer up a thank you to God for the loving kindness and steadfast blessings that I am continually grateful for. It is for the glory of Him that I felt compelled to share this story. We placed our trust in the palm of His hand.

This is a story of Faith, Hope, and Love.



Our Story

CHAPTER ONE



The Nightmare Begins

"Dad, you hurt my neck!"

It was January 1987. Our eldest son, Steven, was seven years old. In the normal fashion of a seven-year-old, he was quite rambunctious. Hockey was his favourite sport. My husband, Richard, was helping remove Steven's equipment after the Saturday morning game when Steven cringed, rubbed the right side of his neck under his ear, and exclaimed, "Dad, you hurt my neck!" Little did we know how those five words would impact the rest of our lives.

Richard observed a lump on Steven's neck and made a mental note, "OK, he's got a lump on his neck about the size of a nickel." Richard then responded to Steven, "No problem, Steven." Being a physician, Richard knew that lumps could be trouble. Steven recoiled and repeated, "No, you really hurt it!"

◇ ◇ ◇

It happened to be a very busy Saturday. We were having a party for my mother. She was celebrating her sixtieth birthday, or as we referred to it—"her twenty-ninth birthday for the thirty-first time." Over the course of the day, Richard continued to watch the lump on Steven's neck grow bigger. By early evening, the lump was clearly visible to us all; it was the size of a small orange. The lump was both tender and somewhat painful. The skin colour looked normal and Steven had no fever. "I think Steven's got early mononucleosis. It's atypical," Richard said. "He's looking well, but I still have questions." I knew that "atypical" meant that this was not a normal presentation.

In fact, Steven looked absolutely fine. He had always been a normal, healthy, and athletic child, so we were trying really hard not to overreact. However, we could not help but be concerned. The lump had become so noticeable that people at the party asked about it. In order to keep the focus on the birthday celebration, Richard casually responded, “I don’t know. He probably bruised himself playing hockey. But, we will keep an eye on it.”

Richard monitored the lump all day Sunday. By Sunday night, he was very worried. The lump had not gone down. All doctors worry about overreacting or underreacting to ailments that strike their own families so they try to avoid diagnosing them.

“Karen,” Richard said to me once Steven had been put to bed, “I would like to share the responsibility. I don’t want to diagnose my own child. Call our family doctor and get him to take a peak at this thing and get his opinion.”

On Monday, I was able to arrange an appointment for Steven to see our family doctor for that afternoon. After a quick but thorough examination, our doctor agreed with Richard’s initial diagnosis. It was likely to be “an atypical presentation of a virus, such as mononucleosis.” With mononucleosis, people usually feel tired and are easily fatigued. They have a sore throat and a rash. They also have swollen glands on either side of their neck.

With a swelling on only one side, our doctor feared that it could be something more obscure. He ordered a chest X-ray and blood work to be done as soon as possible. Steven and I went across the street to the medical lab to get these tests done. I was not expecting anything else than a possible case of mononucleosis—certainly not what was to follow. Because we were just following the orders of our doctor, Steven and I did not think much of these tests. It was Richard who had a sense of uneasiness. I just did not want to go there, yet; I did not want to cross the bridge before we came to it.

By the time we got home from the lab, it was dinner time. I thanked the baby sitter and she left for the day. Steven went into the family room and turned on the television while I prepared dinner. Laura, our five-year-old, ran up to show me a picture that she had drawn that day while she was at school. Ryan, our two-year-old, brought me his chosen toy and wanted me to play with him. The events of the afternoon soon became shadowed by the usual dinner-hour activities. Richard and I will never forget what happened only a few hours later.



Although it was important for us to eat dinner as a family on a daily basis, Richard was later than usual that evening and did not arrive home until about 7:00 p.m. I was already upstairs getting our three children ready for bed. Richard was eating his dinner in the kitchen, a sausage-on-a-bun, when the phone rang. I called out for Richard to pick up the phone. Between bathing one child, chasing another with pyjama bottoms, and diapering a third, there was no way that I could get to the phone in time.

“Hi, how are you doing?” I heard Richard say to the caller. After a few pleasantries back and forth, Richard silenced. It was our family doctor. Richard later told me that he, at first, thought that the family doctor was calling as a professional courtesy to tell us that everything was alright. When the doctor got down to business, Richard realized differently.

The doctor told Richard that the radiologist had just called. Being a doctor, Richard knew that the radiologist would not call the family doctor immediately with the results if they were good. “That doesn’t sound good. What’s going on?” Richard asked. The doctor wanted Steven to see a specialist the next day to “check things out further.”

“What for?” Richard asked. He was told that the radiologist had

found a spot on Steven's lung.

"Tell me about the spot on his lung," I heard Richard say.

"He has something on the left side," was all that the doctor offered, which Richard later relayed to me.

"Tell me what he has on the left side of his lung!" Richard said to him in a firm voice. The doctor seemed to be purposely dragging out the conversation to ease the blow of the news. Finally, he told Richard that the radiologist saw something in the lung field.

From where I was, I could tell that Richard was frustrated. "I'm a doctor! Tell me what you're talking about!" The doctor's next words were those we would never forget: "He has a spot on the left lung...and they don't know what it is."

Richard, wanting the details of exactly what his little boy might have wrong, started firing off questions: "Where is it? Anterior? Posterior? Superior? Inferior? What's going on? Tell me what's going on here!"

The doctor told Richard that it looked "like a solid tumour."

"How big?" Richard asked. By this time, the conversation had totally distracted me from what I was doing. I stood as still as I could so I would not miss anything that was said by Richard.

"They had no trouble seeing it, Rick," was what Richard remembered the doctor to have said next. "You know, this is frustrating me! How big is it?" Richard said, completely irritated by this time.

"Seven centimetres!" was the next thing I heard Richard say. "In diameter? Centimetres? You must mean millimetres! Seven centimetres is huge! This is only a seven-year-old boy we're talking about! His chest isn't much bigger than that!"

The doctor reiterated that the radiologist had confirmed that it was seven centimetres.

Richard was told that there was a problem and that the doctors needed to deal with it.

"What are you suggesting we do?" Richard asked, trying to be calm and objective.

Again, he was told that Steven had to see the specialist immediately. Richard and our doctor spent a few more minutes discussing a plan for the next day.

I had to know what was going on. I sped through the bedtime rituals and stood at the top of the stairs. The parts of the conversation that I could hear pulled me downstairs. By the serious tone of Richard's voice during the phone conversation, I knew that something was amiss. I heard Richard hang up the phone, and then I heard nothing. It was so quiet that I thought he had left the room, but I had not heard his footsteps. I entered the kitchen to find Richard hunched in his chair, with his half-eaten dinner on the table. Upon lifting his head to see me enter the room, he let out the breath he had been holding. Then he inhaled a deep breath and just cried. Although I knew the conversation he had with the doctor was serious, I could not fathom what he had heard to elicit a reaction of this kind. I could only implore him to tell me what had happened.

Choking back tears, he haltingly relayed the conversation. I was listening, but my heart and my mind did not fully comprehend the extent of our problem. Realizing that I was not grasping what I was being told, and perhaps to clarify the situation for both of us, he continued, "This is really a bad thing: to have a tumour in your chest and a lump on the side of your neck. This means that a cancer has probably spread."

In an instant, I felt a tingle shoot through my body. I was hit with a spell of dizziness: my legs felt weak. I was suddenly so aware of my body and what was happening to it. I heard a gasp escape

from my mouth. I had to leave. I wanted to run away from what I had just been told. I turned on my heel and left the room. I could not hold back the tears. As I left the kitchen, I suddenly felt overwhelmingly ill, like someone had just punched me in the stomach. I ran to the bathroom with all the speed my weighted legs could give me, grabbed the handle of the door to throw it open, and bent over the toilet just in time to vomit. I was retching in reaction to the emotional turmoil created by the shock of the situation. "This cannot be happening," I repeated to myself. In one moment, just like that, our lives were turned upside down.

While I stood in disbelief in the bathroom, looking at my reddened face in the mirror and brushing my dampened hair away from my eyes, and while Richard sat in the same kitchen chair he was in before the call from the doctor, as if held there by some unseen force, the phone rang a second time. Richard stood up, walked over, and answered it. This time it was our parish priest. "Richard, this is Father Con. How are you? I am calling about Steven's upcoming First Holy Communion." Never has our priest called our home. Ever.



Richard was so overcome by the power of the moment that tears welled up in his eyes, and he was unable to respond to Father Con's question.

"What's wrong, Richard?" Father Con asked.

"Just bear with me, Father," Richard said after clearing his throat. "I'll get it out, but it's going to take a few minutes...we have received some bad news." Richard told Father Con about the recent telephone conversation with our family doctor and explained Steven's medical problem. Richard relayed that the situation did not look good and ended the conversation by asking Father Con for prayers.

We were unaware of the significance of Father Con's call at that point in time. Richard later questioned me: "Was it a coincidence? Did Father Con, in some way, learn of our situation?" We also did not realize that Richard's request to Father Con was just the beginning of our request for prayers. It would not be until days later that we would realize the powerful part that prayer would play in our lives.



That evening, Richard telephoned his older brother, Angelo, who also is a physician. Angelo immediately came over to our house to discuss the seriousness of our situation. He tried to comfort us, to give us hope. "Don't forget, they could be wrong. They could be wrong! One, or even both of the tumours could be benign! These tumours may not even be related."

Richard and his brother knew that if both tumours were related and malignant, it would be Steven's death sentence. We all agreed that we desperately needed some hope.