

*If Changed
Forever*

*By
His
Grace*

Rhonda Lea Elliott





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Our prayer at Olive Press is that we may help make the Word of Adonai fully known, that it spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere. We hope our books help open people's eyes so they will turn from darkness to Light and from the power of the adversary to God and to trust in **ישוע** Yeshua (Jesus). (From II Thess. 3:1; Col. 1:25; Acts 26:18,15 NRSV *New Revised Standard Version* and CJB *Complete Jewish Bible*) May this book in particular cause hearts to more fully understand our Savior's grace..

This book is dedicated to the Lord God of Israel; the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Without His eternal, immeasurable love for me, none of this could ever have been written.

Revelation 12:11

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

John 8:32

And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Jeremiah 29:13

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.

Matthew 7:7

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.

Proverbs 8:17

I love those who love Me, and those who seek Me diligently will find Me.

Jesus, You Gave Me Your Life

I spent so many years
Bound up in my fears
Searching for the Truth
Pursuing You, my King
To only You I cling

You came into my heart
When we were far apart
You set me free
And gave to me
New Life,
Jesus, you gave to me Your Life

I once cried bitter tears
I once was hurt and wounded
And now I still cry tears
But they are an ointment
A sweet and simple offering
Of love returned to you from me

Jesus, how can I repay
The love you gave to me?
I just want to make each day
A sweet and simple offering

You came into my heart
When we were far apart
You set me free
And gave to me
New Life
Jesus, you gave to me Your Life.

Rhonda Lea 1992

SPECIAL THANKS to my husband John who believed in me and did not give up encouraging me to write this book. His prayers have upheld and strengthened me. He, next to Jesus, is the solid rock in my life upon whom I know I can lean on in times of trouble and sing and dance with in times of joy. Thank you, my love.

IN MEMORY OF my mother who was a poignant example to me of love and humility, the woman who put me on the path that led me to Jesus.

IN MEMORY OF my father who inspired me to dream the impossible dream and accomplish great things if I put my mind and my heart fully into it.

WITH GRATEFUL LOVE TO my two children who are God's most treasured gift to me and to my adorable grandchildren with whom God has blessed me beyond measure.

To my sister and my two brothers whose 60th birthday gift to me along with my children, made it financially possible for me to purchase my own computer and who have been asking me since I retired, "Are you writing yet?"

To all the teachers and librarians and members of this small community who told me how much they enjoyed my newspaper articles and to all the people who have come in and out of my life through the years, including friends who enrich my life; pastors and messianic rabbis who have imparted truth to me and who have been true examples of Christian love to my husband and me. You have all had a part in God's plan for us. *"For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope"* (Jeremiah 29:11).

My appreciation goes to Cheryl Zehr, Director of Olive Press and her team. Thank you, Cheryl, for working tirelessly to take my manuscript and turn it into a book to the praise and honor of the Lord.

The following is an excerpt by Shimon Peres in the Forward to *Dawn of the Promised Land*, Ben Wicks' book about the birth of the modern state of Israel.

"With echoes of the Holocaust and European persecution still ringing in their ears, these courageous pioneers *chose hope over despair*. Undaunted by a hostile landscape born of centuries of neglect, these determined adventurers chose to reclaim a land and *turn failure into great accomplishment*."

Ezekiel 37:11-14 *Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off! Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD."*

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“Why Do They Say We Killed Jesus?”

*Sketches Of My
Early Childhood*

The delicious aroma of homemade chicken soup drifted through the air and up my nostrils causing me to daydream of sitting down to eat those plump matzo balls and soft carrots that floated in a sumptuous broth that only my mother could cook. I was jolted out of my daydream when Mummy abruptly stated half to herself, half to me, “Rhonda, I don’t know why they say we killed Jesus. He was one of us. Why would we kill one of our own?”

How did my mother, a woman who had been raised in an observant Jewish home by Russian Jewish immigrants, know that Jesus was a Jew? That thought had simply not occurred to my young six year old mind. In the few years of my existence up to that moment, as far as I could remember, no one had ever told me much about Jesus. “Who was Jesus?” I asked my mother.

“I think he was a doctor because I have heard that he healed a lot of people,” she replied.

I did not have the intellectual capacity to know what to do with this information but it set my heart on a journey for the next thirty years to find out who this Jesus was.

This is how it all began. On March 23, 1946, I made my arrival into this world in a small, red brick building, which was the first Mt. Sinai Hospital of Toronto. Later, my sister Gilda was born in that same hospital, as were my older brothers, Larry and Stan.

The Toronto Hebrew Maternity and Convalescent Hospital, located in the neighborhood which is now Yorkville, was founded in 1923. The name was changed in 1924 to Mount Sinai because Jewish doctors were not allowed to intern or to hold positions in a “Toronto” hospital at that time. “Through the 1930’s and 40’s universities and professional schools also set quotas on Jewish enrollment or refused Jewish students completely. For example, the Toronto General Hospital accepted only one Jewish internship per year.” (“Anti-Semitism in Canada,” Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.)

Many Jewish people I have met in Toronto were born in the old Mount Sinai Hospital.

I have been told that not too long after Gilda's birth our mother had what they called a nervous breakdown. I was just a toddler at the time. My brother Larry, a young boy of perhaps eleven years old then, was at home alone with Mother when she fell unconscious to the floor. He telephoned one of the relatives and the next thing he knew, an ambulance arrived and took his mommy away on a stretcher. She was sent to an asylum in Whitby, Ontario. When I was a young girl, my father related to me that he had insisted on taking our mother out of the hospital after she had been there for nine months. She had been refusing to eat and he was worried that his Esther might die if he didn't take action.

My two aunts cared for my sister Gil and me for a period of time while our mother was absent. After she returned home, a number of nannies were hired to care for us until Mother was able to do so herself. The only one that I remember is tall, redheaded Kay.

I was too young to know much about Kay. All I knew was that she and her young son shared a room on the second floor of our house and that she was Catholic. I was very curious about the statue of Mary over her bed. I knew it was Mary because Kay told me. She sternly instructed me never to touch the statue because Mary was the mother of Jesus. I had no idea what she meant but I was too timid to ask. Because of Kay, we switched from chicken soup on Friday evenings to fish and chips. We carried on with this tradition after Kay left us and when we were old enough, Gil and I had the task of going to the fish and chip restaurant on Avenue Road and Davenport to bring the meal home. We loved it. The hot food was wrapped in newspaper and we clutched the parcels close to our chests as we scurried home with the delicious aroma wafting up into our nostrils. That's enough about fish and chips. Now, let me tell you about my mother.

My mother's name was Esther Miriam. She was born March 11, 1907. When she was thirteen she was taken out of school to care for her six brothers and two sisters. She was the oldest of her siblings and her mother, whom we called Bubbie, was in poor health.

My first memory of Mother is when we were very little and had been playing out in the snow, sliding down an icy slope at the end of our street. Our snowsuits were soaked right through and Kay instructed my mother to discipline us because we had been told not to wander away from the house. I remember Kay physically placing my mother in a chair and holding her hand to show her how to spank us. As my little sister and I stood there, ready to take our punishment, we looked on in confusion at our mother who appeared to be in a comatose-like state. This must have taken place not too long after she came home from Whitby because that is the only time I can recall her being in such a condition.

On the contrary, I remember my mother as a warm, affectionate woman. When I was about four years old I was standing at the top of the wooden flight of stairs on the second floor of our house. The next thing I knew, I somehow tripped and fell, tumbling down to the bottom. Mummy came running and lifted me, a sobbing little girl, into her arms. I was frightened but not injured, so Mummy cuddled and rocked me back and forth, sitting on a dining room chair. I sank into her soft, cushiony arms and drifted off into a soothing, peaceful slumber. Mummy was the one who rushed to my kindergarten class to bundle me into a taxi cab and take me to Sick Children's hospital because I had broken my wrist playing "crack the whip" on the ice in the school yard. Other memories are of a tenacious woman who chased me through the house and out into the yard until she caught me so she could burst a boil on my stomach. Even though Mummy was overweight, I couldn't outrun her! I have memories of Gil (short for Gilda) and me, after misbehaving, running up the stairs at home with Mummy in hot pursuit, yelling, "When I catch you, I'm going to smack you down!" There was only one time when we thought Ma was really serious and we ran for our lives. We were sometimes very naughty, but she didn't have it in her heart to physically strike us.

Mummy seemed to be forever chasing after someone. If she wasn't running onto the verandah with Daddy's brown paper

lunch bag as she hollered to him on the street, “Albert, Albert you forgot your lunch,” she was running down the verandah steps after Gilda and me on our way to high school, shouting, “Rhonda, Gilda, I have scrambled eggs and toast on the table for you!”

“Sorry Ma, we’re late for school,” would be our quick reply as we raced along the street to catch our bus at the corner.

Often, I would dash back to the house because I had forgotten one of my school books and, as Mummy handed it to me she would say, “Rhonda, you would forget your head if it wasn’t attached to your neck!”

My two older brothers, Stan and Larry, have both been a strong positive influence in my life, although I didn’t see as much of Larry in my early years. He is ten years older than me and had left home by the time I was six or seven. He visited often but because of the age difference, we didn’t get to know him very well until we were older. I was closer to Stan since he is only four years older than me.

Stan was the one I could talk to about my problems and know that he would really listen. He was also the one who was there for me, to dry my tears. I remember one time I was so upset about something or other that I cried until I could hardly open my eyes. Stan found me in the upstairs hallway and took me to the bathroom where he laid compresses of warm water on my eyes and talked soothingly to me until I felt better. At times such as that, Stan was like “John Boy” with his little sisters in the Walton series.

Other times he was the typical mischievous brother. One winter, our bedroom on the third floor was so cold that Gil and I kept our socks on when we went to bed. One night Stan told us, “Don’t you know that potatoes will grow between your toes if you keep your socks on while you sleep?” What’s incredible is that we actually believed him!

My siblings and I grew up in an area of Toronto that was called “The Annex.” We lived at 73 Dupont Street which was not a Jewish neighborhood as were Kensington and Brunswick Av-

enues. My mother’s father, Grandfather Wilson, had purchased the home for our parents. It was a red brick, semi-detached, three storey building with a narrow alley between ours and the next semi-detached home. We had a wooden verandah in the front which had a powder blue floor and steps leading up to it with a cream-colored railing trimmed in green. There was a small porch off the kitchen at the back of the house where a clothes line ran along the length of the back yard to a post at the end. My brother Larry fixed a contraption on the porch ceiling with which he did pull ups. It worked fine until he pulled the roof down.

When I was about three or four years old, a photographer came to our house to take a professional photograph of the four of us children. The night before the big event, I had to endure Kay painstakingly inserting bobby pins in my hair to make it curly like my little sister’s. Gil had large blue eyes and a head full of thick blonde curls. She reminded us of “Little Orphan Annie” from the popular comic strip at the time. In contrast, my hair was jet black and as straight as a board.

I was very fidgety and did not want to hold still while my hair was being worked on. I could hardly wait to get away from her because she had been drinking and her breath made me feel sick and dizzy. It seemed like she took hours. I was so relieved when she was finally finished. I slept with pin curls in my hair and the next morning, when the bobby pins were removed, I looked like a dark-haired Shirley Temple.

The photographer arrived and seated the four of us on our maroon colored sofa with the diamond patterned upholstery. Gilda and I were placed in the middle with Stan and Larry on the outside. Stan was beside me and he had quite a job to try to get me to stop crying so I would look at the camera. I was paralyzed with fear. The big black box had a curtain over it and was balanced on four thin poles. I was traumatized as I saw a man’s arm sticking out the side holding a huge orange bulb attached to a rubbery hose. I wanted no part of it. I finally looked up with a sullen face

CHAPTER 5

"Maybe Next Year"

Growing Up

During my early childhood years, my mother imparted to me a love for reading and writing. She took me to the library often and read to us from Aesop's Fables. She also recited many nursery rhymes from memory, such as, "Hickory Dickory Dock" as well as long poems, such as, "The Spider And The Fly." After I learned to read, I enjoyed "The Bobbsey Twins" and "Raggedy Ann" comic books. As I matured, two of my favorite authors were Charles Dickens and Louisa May Alcott. I enjoyed Louisa May Alcott's book, *Little Men* more than *Little Women* as I was somewhat of a tomboy. When I was about eleven years old, my imagination was captured by the Dickens novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which was first printed as a book in 1841. I noticed it in Stan's bedroom on one of the mornings that I had to wake him up for school. It was a small, thick, maroon colored, leather bound book. Stan noticed me lovingly holding it. "Would you like to read that book, Ronnie? You might be a little too young for it though."

"Oh Stanley, could I, could I, please?"

"Sure," he replied. "Just take good care of it, okay?" I cherished that book as I stepped into its pages. Little Nell and her grandfather became so real to me in their plight and my heart broke when Nell died.

I longed to write like that. I wanted to write about things that really mattered and to be able to do it in such a way as to bring the reader into my story as if they were living it. I mentioned to my father that I would like to be a writer someday and that my teachers all said I had a talent for it. "That's a wonderful ambition Rhonda," he told me.

"But Daddy, how do I do it?" I asked.

"Well, if you want to be a writer, you just need to write."

“But what do I write?”

“Rhonda, just start by writing down things that happen in your life. Before you know it, you will think of lots of things to write about.” That was an excellent piece of advice from my father that, unfortunately, I did not take.

As an adult, I have been inspired by biographies and autobiographies of women who have made a difference in the world. One of my favorite women is Golda Meir, born Golda Mabovich, May 3, 1898 in Kiev, Russian Empire, which is present day Ukraine. Who would have thought that this little girl who emigrated to the United States with her family in 1906 would become the fourth Prime Minister of the State of Israel in 1969?

I had one friend who loved reading as much as I did. Her name was Genevieve. She was a real book worm and we used to enjoy going to the library together. One day, she asked me to stay overnight at her house. I was still in elementary school, perhaps around grade four and my parents were reluctant to let me stay the night but after much pleading on my part they finally agreed.

Just as we were bedding down, Genevieve asked if I could keep a secret. Of course, I replied enthusiastically, “Yes.”

Then she told me, “The bed you are sleeping in tonight is my little brother’s, and he has been really sick with scarlet fever, and my mother has not had time to change the sheets. Please don’t tell anyone because my mother could get into a lot of trouble. You have to promise that you will not tell a soul.” Of course, I had no idea how serious this was so I promised her and we drifted off to sleep. I remember waking up the next morning with a throbbing headache and feeling weak and sick to my stomach. I left without having breakfast and walked home as quickly as I was able. By the time I arrived home I could barely stand up. As soon as I came in the door my parents could see that something was terribly wrong with me. They laid me on the sofa in the living room, took my temperature and called good old Dr. Giddens to tell him I had a raging fever and to please come immediately to the house.

After the doctor examined me, he asked me if anyone in my friend’s family had been sick but I was certainly not about to break my promise to Genevieve so I said, “No.” To tell you the truth, I imagine the doctor and my parents did some investigation of their own and all I know is that I was never allowed a sleepover again.

Carla, a cute, short lady who rented the rooms on the second floor of our house for a time, helped to take care of me while I was sick with scarlet fever. Our house was quarantined and I was prescribed penicillin in what seemed to me to be the most gigantic, round, pink pills I had ever tried to swallow. Carla used to come in the middle of the night to awaken me to take one. I was laid up for a few weeks, as I recall. When I was finally able to go outside again, Carla decided to take my sister and me for a ride in the country in her car as she said the fresh air would be very good for me. Our aunts were the only women we knew who had their own vehicles, so this was a rare occasion for us indeed.

I felt wobbly and weak for awhile but it wasn’t long before I was back to my old self, running and playing softball with the other children. There was no more special treatment for me and before I knew it, I was back to day dreaming and getting myself into trouble.

I will never forget my fourth grade teacher, Ms. Black. I had been put into the advanced stream to do second, third, and fourth grades in two years, so I was young for a fourth grader as were the others in my class. I was so happy to be back at school after being sick with Scarlet Fever for, what seemed to me, to be an eternity. As was her practice, Ms. Black began our morning by reading a Bible verse. I must have wandered off in my mind to some imaginary place because I was suddenly startled to hear our teacher shouting, “Rhonda Middlestadt, this is the third time I have told you this morning to throw out your gum!” I made it worse by telling her that I had not heard her. I was ordered to spend recess in the cloakroom with my face towards the wall. This was such a humiliation because the children all made fun of me as they

passed by on their way to the school yard. But what caused me the most pain was the fact that I was telling Ms. Black the truth. I really didn't hear her. I must have been day dreaming.

Another frustrating time when no one believed me was when I accidentally opened the bathroom door at home on Mr. Hubble, one of our boarders and saw him on the toilet. I was only about eight years old and I just stood there in shock with my mouth open while he yelled at me to close the door. He thought I had opened the door on purpose as a prank. When I came to my senses, I ran down the hallway and threw myself sobbing across my parent's bed. I cried over and over, "I didn't do it on purpose," while Mummy gave me a lecture about little white lies becoming big black ones.

When I was about twelve years old, I had a silly crush on our paperboy who lived on the other side of the street. One summer evening, as I sat on our front steps with the garden hose in my hand watering the front lawn, he came towards our house carrying newspapers under his arm to make his delivery. I was staring at him, wondering what I could say, when all of a sudden he was soaking wet, papers and all, and screaming at me. My father came charging out the front door behind me about the same time as the boy's father came running across the road to our house. I was amazed to find out that I was to blame! My hand that had been holding the hose followed my eyes towards him. I was really in trouble for day dreaming that time! Daddy sent me to my room as he battled it out with the paper boy's father. Once again no one would believe me when I said I had not done it on purpose. Such was my life.

Besides the paperboy, we had a bread man, a milkman, and an egg man. Our milkman used to make deliveries with a horse drawn truck. As Gil and I heard the clip clop of hooves, we would gleefully run to our mother who handed us sugar cubes to give to the horses.

On Friday evenings during dinner our delivery men would come to the door one by one to collect for the week, the paper boy usually arriving first. It was always as if our parents never knew they were coming. The rhetoric would go something like this; "Who could that be at such a time as this Albert?" or "Esther, didn't we just pay the bread man?"

"Albert, that was last week already." And so it would go until they had all been paid.

Even though Grandfather Wilson had purchased the house on Dupont Street for our parents, our father had many medical expenses because of the medications needed for our mother. We didn't have any such thing as a Universal Health Plan or, for that matter, any kind of a health plan in those days. Daddy would always proudly say, "We may not have much money but my children always have plenty of food to eat and clothes on their backs."

A time that I wished our family had more money was when I was in grade five. I had been invited to a birthday party by the richest girl in our school. In the winter, Maybeth wore a one piece green snow suit, a luxury in those days, with white fur around the hood. The rest of us were a little envious of this pretty little blonde girl. We dressed with separate leggings and jackets because our skirts had to be showing outside of our snow pants. Girls were not allowed to wear slacks to school. Maybeth was able to bypass that ruling since it would be impossible for her to do so in a one piece snowsuit.

I had no idea how I was singled out to go to her party. I wasn't particularly enthusiastic about it because I imagined she lived in some kind of a mansion and what would I wear to a rich girl's party? Worse still, I had no way of purchasing a gift for her! My mother came up with the brilliant idea that I could give her my little red patent leather purse. "But, Mummy, she will know it's not new!"

My mother replied, "Look Rhonda, we'll shine it up and wrap it in pretty paper and Maybeth will never know the difference."

I had terrible visions of arriving at the party and everyone pointing to me saying, “Look, Rhonda couldn’t even bring a new gift.” The day arrived and I hesitantly climbed the stone steps up to Maybeth’s front door, gingerly ringing the bell. I shyly produced my gift and, to my utter amazement, my mother was right. She loved her little red purse, and I was relieved and enjoyed myself. I even forgot how much I loved that purse myself.

Not long after that birthday party, the school dentist checked all the students’ teeth and sent a note home to my parents that one of my teeth had a cavity. My mother set up an appointment for me with Dr. Hord and the dreaded day arrived. The cracks in the sidewalk seemed to rush under my feet in a never ending rhythm as I tried to slow my pace in an attempt to avoid the inevitable. “Rhonda, we’re going to be late for your dentist appointment,” Mummy said as she took my hand firmly and prodded me along. “I know you are afraid but just think of it this way. Tomorrow, you will be walking along this same street to school and the dentist appointment will have been yesterday!” It didn’t help me to forget about what was ahead of me that afternoon, but this was not the first time my mother imparted a spirit of hope to me that would prove to be invaluable during many trying circumstances later in my life. No matter how dark the night may be, the morning will always come and there will be the dawn of a new day. What a miracle that is.

~~~~~

Psalm 30:5 *Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.*

~~~~~

My father also unknowingly kept that spark of hope alive in me. When I was in elementary school, I read the book, *Black Beauty*, by Anna Sewell. I was captured by the enduring tale of this beautiful black horse. After I read that book, every year on my birthday I would ask my father if this would be the year that he would buy a ranch and some horses, to which he always replied,

“Maybe next year.” That gave me hope until I was old enough to understand the realities of life and finances, but I am thankful for those years that I was able to dream.

Later, as a young teenager, my sister told me that her Scottish girlfriend Cathleen had a cousin who lived on a horse ranch just outside of Toronto. I begged my parents until they let me go to that ranch upon occasion to learn to ride. I was thrilled when Davey would arrive in his dirty old pick-up truck to transport me there. I thoroughly loved every minute of it, even walking the horses around the corral after a run to cool them down. I especially enjoyed the speed of galloping with the wind whooshing through my hair. I felt so free during those precious moments. To me, horses were magnificently beautiful creatures. I was in awe of how sensitive they were to me and how aware they were of my every move. I had not known such oneness with an animal before. I had a desire to fly through the air on my trusty steed while leaving the cares of my earthly existence behind.

~~~~~

*Revelation 19:11-16 Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.*