



# *Betrothed*

A COLLECTION OF

LOVE STORIES

REFLECTING AN ANCIENT FAITH

Presented by

HaYovel Inc. and the Waller family

([www.hayovel.com](http://www.hayovel.com))



*Betrothed*, A COLLECTION OF LOVE STORIES REFLECTING AN ANCIENT FAITH

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*I go to prepare a place for you.*

John 14:2

*I will come again and receive you to Myself.*

John 14:3



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If you have any questions when you are finished reading this book, feel free to write to Brayden and Tali Waller at [brayden@hayovel.com](mailto:brayden@hayovel.com)



*The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king  
who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.*

Matthew 22:2 NIV



# Foreword

By Tommy and Sherri Waller

## The Beauty of Holiness

*“Oh, worship the LORD in the Beauty of Holiness!”* (Psalm 96:9)

Is it conceivable within the walls of our faith to define the “Beauty of Holiness?” Have we seen it? Have we experienced it? Can we rightly worship God without understanding the Beauty of His Holiness?

It may sound absurd, but there were years in my life when I desperately sought to find beauty in unholiness. I was told and taught that the beauty of unholiness was found in God’s grace—His unmerited favor. Since it is “impossible for me or anyone to walk in holiness,” my only hope was to abandon myself to God’s grace. “I am a wretched sinner, desperately wicked, and through ‘God’s unmerited favor,’ I can stay that way for the rest of my life...and feel good about it.” After all, Yeshua said in John 8:7 (NIV), *“If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone...”* In 1 John 1:8 we are taught that, *“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.”*

Is this truly the “good news” Yeshua came to deliver—to merely cover our sins like a beautiful cloth can cover an old and rotten piece of furniture? Yeshua’s “good news” message to the woman who was about to be stoned for her sin was, “Go and sin no more.” He goes on to say, *“I am the light of the world [The Beauty of Holiness]. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness [sin], but have the light of life [The Beauty of Holiness]”* (brackets mine).

As we read further in 1 John, he writes in chapter three verse eight, *“He who sins is of the devil.... for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”*

The truth is that there never has been and there never will be beauty in unholiness. The Bible, God’s word and instruction, specifically teaches us that unholiness, which may also be defined as unrighteousness, always has a destructive end. If, today, a person makes a decision to be unfaithful (unholy/unrighteous) to his or her spouse, it will lead to a devastating wound—one that may never heal. I have heard magnificent testimonies from men and women boasting of God’s grace over the sin of unfaithfulness (adultery). Each time I am encouraged by the person’s desire, after hitting bottom, to rise again to the place of faithfulness. However, as I am listening to the remarkable testimony, my mind drifts to the question of how the spouse is doing in all this? How are the children? How is the “other” person entangled in this affair?

It may be difficult to create a box office hit or to sell magazines at Walmart without unfaithful (unholy) content, but out of all the people I know desiring to get married—to start a family—I have never met the person whose heart longs to find an unfaithful spouse. There is no beauty in unholiness.

The betrothal accounts in this book are to me an epic picture of the “Beauty of Holiness.” These accounts tell of couples who chose to stay away from the destructive path of unfaithfulness and defraudment even before marriage. Many of these accounts are written by my own children. Their testimonies are the result of God’s mercy in making a presentation to me and my wife, Sherri, many years ago. He enabled us to see clearly that our children were at great risk and under the plan of unfaithfulness and defraudment. Which of our children would make it and which ones would fall?

At this writing we have five married children. All of them have chosen to walk through the beautiful process of betrothal. There has never been a time in my life when I have witnessed anything close to the intensity of love birthed from two undefiled hearts

as I have in betrothal. Every betrothal I witness confirms in me the Father's true grace—the unmerited favor He desires to lavish on all of us. After experiencing the “Beauty of His Holiness,” I would be a fool to ever look back.

*Tommy Waller*  
*Executive Director, HaYovel Inc.*

### **Be Prepared to Enter into a Different World.**

These accounts open up the heart of God for His people. His ways are high and lofty, set apart...unlike anything common or natural. They are holy.

It is the responsibility of the people of God to make His ways known to the world, to separate the clean from the unclean, the profane from the holy. This is what betrothal is all about!

Tommy and I set out on a quest to bring our children to marriage pure. We didn't have a model, but we had the Guidebook, and we knew that God had a perfect plan. Unbeknownst to us, we entered a paradigm shift. When we embraced the ways of the God of Israel, betrothal opened up to us. The thought was deep in our spirits and we were committed to protect and direct our children, and not to be intimidated by our own past failures or other's attempts to discourage us. We would fight for it! God birthed the zeal in us to carry us all the way step by step. We are humbled to see how God has honored our simple faith and blessed us past our wildest dreams! We couldn't see the end; you never can. We only need the faith to trust for the beginning.

*Sherri Waller*  
*Helpmeet to Tommy Waller and mother of eleven*



*And I John saw  
the holy city, new Jerusalem,  
coming down from God out of heaven,  
prepared as a bride  
adorned for her husband.*

Revelation 21:1



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# Introduction

## The Beauty of Betrothal

The bridegroom heart of God is a recurring theme throughout Scripture. The Bible actually begins and ends with a wedding: first, Adam and Eve in the garden, and last, the marriage supper of the Lamb. Betrothal is an essential key to this whole story. To understand this ancient and Biblical way of marriage is to better understand the relationship we have with God. My hope in this introduction is to show how betrothal paints a vivid picture of the covenant relationship we have with Yeshua (Jesus).

What my Dad told me growing up is especially true of betrothal: God loves object lessons. He loves them because they speak directly to our hearts. Like marriage, betrothal is an object lesson or parable reflecting our covenant with God. In Ephesians we see Paul calling the parable of marriage a “great mystery.” Ephesians 5:31-33 says, “*For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery but I speak concerning [Messiah] and the church.*” This symbolic picture of marriage is most likely not a new idea to you; however, maybe the picture of betrothal is. Our prayer is that the testimonies in this book will give you greater understanding and appreciation of this ancient path.

Unlike engagement, betrothal is an actual covenant that is made prior to the wedding day. Biblical betrothal can basically be defined as a covenant that unites a man and woman in marriage, but is not physically consummated until the day of the wedding. Establishing a covenant before the wedding is the very thing God has done with us! He has made a covenant with us by the blood of Yeshua, and the wedding is yet to come. Revelation 19:7 tells us of this coming wedding, “Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife

has made herself ready.” Yeshua loves us as a man loves his bride! When we embrace His love in this way it becomes real and pulsing with life.

Betrothal is much further reaching than the confines of a culture. It is something that the LORD Himself participates in. He says in Hosea 2:19-20, “*I will betroth you to Me forever; yes I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you will know the LORD.*” In verse sixteen of this same chapter, God says, “*You will call Me ‘My Husband,’ And no longer call Me ‘My Master.’*” Do you hear the heartbeat of God? He wants to be an intimate husband to His people. Even in His appeal for us to come back to Him, listen to God’s compassionate voice, “*Return O backsliding children,*” says the LORD, “*for I am married to you*” (Jeremiah. 3:14). Exposed and vulnerable, God lays His broken heart before His people. He is the faithful husband who cries out for us to return to Him. In full assurance, God waits, knowing that one day His Bride will turn to Him in wholehearted love. He sees the end already and has foretold it. One day the Bride will be enamored with her Bridegroom King. Along with the Spirit, she will cry “Come!” (Revelation. 22:17). So may the cry of our hearts intensify as we long to be with Yeshua. In answer to a question about fasting, Yeshua replied, “*Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast*” (Matthew 9:15). Here, Yeshua identifies himself as a bridegroom. He said when He is taken away, then they will fast. We are in that season now. Our betrothed bridegroom is not physically with us, therefore we fast as an expression of the ache in our hearts for Him to come. Come, Yeshua come!

In this book we show what a modern-day betrothal can look like. You will encounter stories as broad in scope as the personalities of those who wrote them. Each story will have its own



unique sparkle of divine authorship shining through the couple's testimony. While some like a small intimate gathering for the betrothal ceremony, others prefer to include many to witness their vows. Some separate after the betrothal, not seeing each other until the wedding. Others choose to spend time together leading up to the wedding. Some have a long period of time between the wedding and betrothal, while others like to keep the waiting time to a minimum and have the wedding just weeks after the betrothal. The details are just like the wedding dress, tailor-designed to meet the desires of the couple.

First, let's turn our attention to God's covenant faithfulness through history. As clouds are made amazingly beautiful when the sun shines through them, so the pages of the Bible come alive with beauty when they are illuminated with God's love. Jeremiah 2:2: *"Thus says the LORD: 'I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.'"* From the context of this verse, we see that the people whom God is speaking to about betrothal are the Israelites in the wilderness. It was there, far away from the slavery and distractions of Egypt, that God made a covenant with Israel. Sometimes God does the same with us. He strips away what is familiar and comfortable to show us our great need for Him.

There are four primary love stories in the Bible that reflect the bridegroom heart of God. I will list them and give a brief summary of how they reflect the Bridegroom.

#### Adam and Eve—The need for a bride.

God brought all the animals before Adam, but none was found to be a helper for him. Adam was alone and incomplete until God made Eve. Just as there was a void in Adam's heart until Eve was brought to him, so there is a void in the heart of Yeshua until His Bride is prepared and the wedding takes place.

#### Isaac and Rebecca—The Holy Spirit, The Helper, seeks out a bride.

Abraham sends out his servant to seek a bride for his son. This unnamed servant is most likely Eliezer (Genesis 15:2), whose name means "God is my helper"! Rebecca's willingness to go with this servant is a picture of the Bride's willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit (The Helper) in preparation to meet her Beloved.

#### Boaz and Ruth—The Redeemer purchases a bride from the nations.

Boaz redeems (buys) Ruth from a life of poverty and shame even though she is a Moabitess. The undeserved favor that Ruth receives from Boaz is a picture of the undeserved favor that Yeshua shows to us.

#### King Ahasuerus and Esther—The Bride reigning with the King.

In this beautiful story, God favors a lowly orphan girl, Esther, by raising her up to be the queen of a vast kingdom. Fasting and intercession play a major role in Esther fulfilling her divine destiny. The Bride in the last days will also be engaged in fasting and prayer to see the Kingdom of God established on earth.

Every one of these stories is loaded with revelation about Yeshua and The Bride. I encourage you to read these accounts and ask the Father to give you deeper understanding into His heart.

The two most significant parts of a betrothal ceremony are the drinking of the cup and the bride price. The climax of a betrothal is when the groom signifies his vows by drinking from a cup of wine and then hands the cup to the bride. If she drinks, the covenant is sealed. Without understanding this concept that was familiar to the people of Yeshua's day, the significance of



“the cup” is not fully grasped. *“Then He took the cup and gave thanks, and gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom’”* (Matthew 26:27-29). That night when the disciples drank the cup, they in essence were agreeing to the covenant Yeshua proposed to them. They were spiritually entering into a betrothal, just as we in a spiritual way become betrothed to Yeshua when we say yes to Him and “drink the cup.” For Yeshua, the cup was symbolic of His shed blood, the price he paid to redeem us. This “cup” that Yeshua drank was a point of great turmoil for Him as He wrestled in the garden with the immense suffering He would endure as He poured His life out on the tree. He begged that if it could be the Father’s will, that the cup would pass from Him. In the end, Yeshua embraced the Father’s will and paid the price. *“For you were bought at a price”* (1 Corinthians 6:20). *“Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”* (1 Peter 1:18-19) Here are a few Bible references where the practice of paying a “bride price” is mentioned: Exodus 22:16, and 2 Samuel 3:14. Because of its rich symbolic meaning, many incorporate the “bride price” into their betrothal.

At the set time when the Father says “Go!,” Yeshua will come for His Bride and the marriage will be complete. When we take on the magnitude that we are preparing for a wedding feast, we no longer view holiness as a burdensome lifestyle, but rather as pure white linen on a beautiful bride.

Joseph and Mary’s betrothal story is found in Matthew 1:18-19. *“Now the birth of Yeshua Messiah took place in this way. When His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph, before they came together she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. And her husband Joseph,*

*being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly”* (RSV). This account gives us a window of understanding into what first century betrothal would have looked like. First we see that Joseph and Mary were betrothed before they came together (before they were fully married). Secondly, we see that the betrothal covenant was so strong it would require a divorce to end it.

Whether you are reading this book for the spiritual application of being betrothed to Yeshua, or you are interested in betrothal as the way you want to start your covenant with your future spouse, know that entering into covenant with someone is no small matter. *“For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you a chaste virgin to [Messiah]”* (2 Corinthians 11:2). One day the Bride will be presented to Messiah pure and spotless! What a glorious truth! Yeshua desires us so much that He paid the price of His own blood to redeem us. May your love for Him be stirred to new heights as you read this book.

*Brayden Waller*



*The  
Love Stories*

# "His Banner over Me is Love"

*Brayden and Tali Waller*

## **Brayden's Story**

When I was growing up, Dad and Mom set a vision before me of only being romantically involved with one person. I remember Mom telling me not to kiss her on the lips because that was the kiss I should save for my future wife. When I would see my parents lovingly linger at the door before Dad went to work, giving one another that special kiss, it only served to reinforce my young heart's resolve to wait for the "one."

By the time I was sixteen or so, Dad began having discussions with my younger brother Zac (14) and me on what he called the "game plan." The game plan consisted of the real life process of pursuing a wife without having to wrestle through the entangling nets of youthful lust. Paul tells us to flee youthful lust (2 Timothy 2:22). The world promotes the exact opposite of this by encouraging young people to stir up youthful lust at every chance. Dad encouraged us to do something different than the status quo—something that, with God's help, would protect and prepare us to enter into marriage with our emotional and physical purity still intact. One thing Dad would ask us was, "If you knew that your future wife was with (i.e. dating) another guy, how would you feel about that?" Our obvious answer was that we wouldn't like it. Dad then turned it around and said, "Well, she probably wouldn't want you to be involved with another girl that way either." It made sense. Dad envisioned something that would spread the weighty decision of marriage and a lifetime partner onto more shoulders than just the emotional guy and girl. The plan was for Dad and Mom (along with me and each of my

brothers) to prayerfully seek God about who the "one" was to be. If we felt confident that God was leading toward a particular young lady, I would then proceed to talk to her father. If her dad felt peace to continue the process, he would present the possibility to the young lady, who would then either say "yes," "no," or "give me time to think about it." If she said yes, then we would get to know each other better. If the answer was no, any further pursuit of her would be halted. These talks provided great structure for the adventure that lay ahead of us. If we intend to go forward living in the culture that surrounds us, we must have a plan of action. Can you imagine embarking on a trip down the Amazon River, only to realize a short way downstream that your canoe is full of holes? Instead of enjoying the ride, you would constantly be trying to keep your canoe from sinking.

God intends for marriage to be a life of adventure, one that becomes more and more engaging with every bend in the river! If you are an unmarried person, make it your goal to keep your canoe hole-free, prepared for the adventure of a lifetime. For those reading who have regrets in regard to purity, don't lose heart. Start now to repair the broken areas of your life by repenting and accepting the forgiveness of Yeshua. He is a faithful restorer!

Primarily, it was my dear parents who spoke truth into my life. There was, however, a young man whom God divinely placed in my life as well, one who dramatically rocked my spiritual world. We had only lived in Russell Creek (a plain, homesteading community) for a few months, when a family from Bolivia moved in next door to us. In this family was a sixteen-year-old son named Noah. I remember as a twelve-year-old going down for the first time to meet the new neighbors. Before I knew it, Noah had begun to show me pictures of the exotic world of Bolivia. The mountain lions, jungles, and hunting stories were enough to impress a boy like me. Adventures like that were pretty distant from my farm-boy experiences. Little did I know when I

left that day, that God was about to fascinate Noah with more than creation, but with the Creator Himself. Not long after our first meeting, Noah got born again. With this event I noticed a marked difference in Noah's life. I saw a delight in holiness and a genuine hunger for God burning in his heart. Seeing this transformation take place before my eyes had a profound effect on me. In the ensuing years, Noah's friendship would continue to challenge and bless me. Once, while I was in the barn working on a project, Noah came riding up on his bicycle with an urgent prayer request. He had received news that a friend of his was sick with a life-threatening illness. After telling me the need for prayer, Noah then posed one of the most pointed questions I had ever been asked. In a tone of simple curiosity, he asked, "Do you ever pray?" I was convicted. I knew prayer was important, but somehow it had found little place in my personal life.

Another time I remember being challenged was one night during a weekly prayer meeting. One of the men we were praying with fervently cried out to God, "Lord, reveal the secret sins!" I was cut to the heart.

If I was going to make any progress pursuing God, I knew there was no alternative but to face the hidden sin in my life. Not until I began confessing my sin did I see the light of Yeshua scatter the darkness. The effect was often instantaneous. After confessing an area of sin I was struggling with, I would feel on top and no longer underneath the sin that was trying to wield its influence over me. My brother, Zac, was a great accountability partner over the years. Confessing our faults to one another (James 5:16) became a powerful weapon against the enemy, leaving no room for sin to fester in the darkness.

At 19 years old I crossed paths with another young man who would impact my life. He is a Canadian named Yisrael. While pruning grapevines on the Mountains of Samaria, Yisrael and I exchanged stories of how the Father had worked in our lives.

We soon realized that our stories had a lot in common. A friendship was born. Yisrael's love for Hebrew was an inspiration that sparked something in my own heart to delve into the language. Also, his deep-rooted faith encouraged me to keep pressing on for all that God had in store for me. A few years after our meeting, he became betrothed and married. Yisrael was the first person that I knew who had decided to do betrothal. Later when I was preparing for Tali and my betrothal ceremony, Yisrael was a great person to get ideas from.

Once while we were staying at a friend's house in Colorado, Yisrael and his wife paid us a surprise visit. It had been quite awhile since Yisrael and I had seen each other and, as far as I knew, he was several hundred miles away. A lot had happened since we had last talked. The father of the family we were staying with runs a window washing business and asked me if I wanted to join him to work for the day. It was an enjoyable day learning the ins and outs of the window washing trade. When we got home my family was all sitting in the living room and I began to tell them about what we had done. What I didn't notice right away was that Yisrael was sitting right in the middle of them. I did a double take or two before realizing who it was. In times of great joy or surprise I am known to be on the exuberant side. So upon finally seeing him, I fell to the floor in shock, beating my cap on the floor at random intervals and laughing. I was overcome with happiness. Soon we began speaking Hebrew as we caught up on each other's lives.

I reflect with a thankful heart for the friendships and experiences that God used to challenge and prepare me to be wed to Tali.

The first time I remember hearing about Tali was in Ariel, Israel, in 2006. She had written us an email with a few links attached. One of these links led to a site where there were pictures of her and her sisters' music band. Upon seeing the pictures,

my brother, Nate, humorously called out to me, “Brayden, I have found your wife!” I was probably the most influenced by our time in Russell Creek, so artsy photos and vintage fashion had little appeal to me. Nevertheless, thanks to Nate, the first time I heard of Tali was of her being my wife! We saw each other for the first time in person at a Passover gathering my family held in Tennessee. At that time, being around Tali and her family was uneventful, but even then God was laying a foundation for the future. It was during this trip that Tali’s parents bought a piece of property in Tennessee. This was very uncharacteristic for Mr. Kenny, Tali’s father, a man who had lived in the same area in Pennsylvania since his childhood. The Lupinaccis (Tali’s maiden name) had their house in Pennsylvania on the market with the intentions of moving to Tennessee as soon as it sold, but no one ended up buying it until a few years later. This left the property in Tennessee available for a young newly-married couple that needed a place to stay—and that was Tali and me!

About a year before I got married, I started to feel restless about my future. With no money-generating job (I was full-time in the family ministry), no house or car, and no way of obtaining these without going into debt (which I was opposed to), I felt that if any young woman was going to be interested in marrying me something had to change. With these thoughts weighing on me, I went with Dad on a little road trip to pick up something. Dad patiently listened as I described how I was not prepared to get married because of all the things I was lacking.

Once I was through, Dad asked, “What about me? I have eleven children.” It was true; Dad’s income was just as much by faith as mine was. I left that conversation feeling much more at peace. After we had sold our farm in Russell Creek to start working in Israel, life took on a new degree of dependency on the Father. The Almighty had proven Himself faithful in every way. Trusting Him was the best place to be. Little did I know, He was

working behind the scenes, and He already had the house question answered.

Tali and I only saw each other sporadically after our first meeting, due to the distance between us. When we did see each other, something that really blessed me about Tali was her non-flirtatious character. This spoke to me that she was content in the Father’s timing.

Because of flights to Israel being cheaper out of northern airports than out of Tennessee, my family would often travel north en route to Israel. One of our favorite stopping places on the way was the Lupinacci’s home in Pennsylvania. Their gift of making someone feel perfectly at home in their house was only accented by the talent of Tali’s mom, Diane, as an Italian cook. Ms. Diane would start preparing food weeks before our arrival. Plus, there was a grand piano nicely situated in their living room, making an ideal place for praise times together.

Tali had been to Israel once before, and since that trip, she had always dreamed of returning. In 2008, when my family left for the airport from the Lupinacci’s house, Tali was visibly emotional that she was not able to go with us. As I later found out, my parents were very impacted by how heartfelt Tali was in her love for Israel. They were so impressed that, during the harvest that year, Dad and Mom took me aside one night and asked me what I thought of Talitha Lupinacci. They were feeling that she could possibly be the one for me. Initially I was hesitant to believe that it could be true. For the time I was content to commit the idea to prayer but I had no real assurance that I should pursue Tali as a potential wife. In God’s plan though, my hesitations were about to disappear.

After that harvest season was over in the mountains of Israel, we flew back into New York, and the Lupinaccis were there to welcome us. We made our way from the airport to the Lupinacci home, got settled in, and everything was going as usual until I

laid my travel-worn body down to sleep. Immediately after falling asleep I had a vivid dream in which Tali told me she wanted to be married. The dream had such a sense of authority to it, that I had little doubt that God was speaking to me. Could it be that after all the years of waiting and praying, God had now revealed who my wife was to be? The next morning, I excitedly went to the room my parents were staying in to let them know about the dream. Later on Mom and Dad told me how amused they were at the possibility of Tali's very artistic world coming together with my very simple, Amish-influenced world.

Tali's room was a work of art. An oversized, gaudy, gold clock contrasted sharply with the wall she had painted bold red. Peacock feathers and rose petals added their own unique touch as well. In some ways our upbringing could not have been more opposite. While I was out under the Tennessee sun plowing behind a team of horses, Tali was in New York City attending fashion school. By this time, however, God was divinely intersecting our paths and neither of us were on such opposite ends of the spectrum as we had been just a few years before. For me, even though I loved the homesteading lifestyle, I knew that God had taken us to Israel where things were much different. For Tali, God had been directing her away from the fashion scene and giving her a heart to pursue purity. I so admire her for walking away from the things aspired to by the world. Needless to say, I was more aware of Tali during the remainder of our time in Pennsylvania.

About four days later, back in Tennessee, I made my way out to the privacy of our little office to make the call to Tali's father. Ms. Diane answered the phone, and when I asked for Mr. Kenny she, with wide-eyed curiosity, handed the phone to him (this was the first time I remember calling the Lupinaccis). Her inquisitiveness only rose, I'm sure, when I asked to talk to Mr. Kenny alone. So Mr. Kenny left the room to talk while Ms. Diane and Tali, full of restless curiosity, waited for him to return. To my surprise, he

acted like he had expected my call. His easygoing nature quickly set all my pent-up emotions at ease. I told him how I respected Tali, and asked what he thought of me pursuing her as a wife. Mr. Kenny was positive about the idea. I left the conversation encouraged but at the same time in suspense. What would Tali think when her dad told her? I wasn't sure when Mr. Kenny was planning to tell her. I didn't expect he would tell her right away. Three days later I got an answer. Mr. Kenny had told Tali right away and she was interested. I was ecstatic! I remember joyously dancing in our living room with some of my younger siblings after hearing the news. I had gone from (1), not knowing whether it was God's will for me to pursue Tali as my wife; to (2), knowing I should pursue her; to (3), finding out she was interested in me, all in a matter of days. It was too good to be true. On top of all this, we were only getting green lights from our parents to keep things going. The agreement that everyone shared in these early stages of the relationship between Tali and me was a major confirmation that we were on the right track.

Thanksgiving was just a few weeks away at the time, so it was planned that the Lupinaccis would join us, along with our extended family, for our traditional Thanksgiving get-together. Our purpose during that Thanksgiving visit was focused. We went on walks together, and we shared our testimonies with each other. We were very honest with one another about our past and also about what we felt God calling us to in the future. Our goal was to find out one thing: was it God's will for us to be married? If the answer was yes, then we wanted to embrace our destiny and move forward. If the answer was no, we wanted to be ready to lay it down without any hurt between us. If there was going to be romance between us, I desired that it would be pure and permanent.

By the end of our time together, there was little doubt in my mind that Tali was the one. As a reminder to her that I was



serious about seeking God for the next step in our relationship, I sent my tallit (a rectangle cloth with tzit-tzit attached to each corner) home with her. Over the following weeks, we continued to pray for God's will to be done concerning us. We had a few talks by phone. We both came to a place of deep peace about the direction we were going, and we began planning the betrothal during this time. Things were happening fast, but if God was the author of it we were more than willing to hold on tight and enjoy the ride. Our next time together in person was a few weeks later during Hanukkah. Here is a journal entry from the trip:

12/17/08: "I'm going north, destined for the Lupinacci's house with Mama Jo and Pa Bill [my grandparents]. They were wanting to visit some relatives up this way, so Zac and I are traveling together with them. There are many unknowns for me about this trip, one being how Talitha's extended family is going to react to me."

We arrived at the Lupinacci's after a full day's drive. The snow-packed driveway was too slick to drive on so we parked on the road, about seventy-five feet from the house. Nearly running across the icy yard, I made a beeline for the front door. Once inside, I exuberantly greeted the family. Until now I had felt reserved around Tali. This time though, I felt at liberty to really express my excitement.

We were thinking of doing the betrothal in mid-January, which was only a few weeks away. So the primary purpose of this trip was to begin working on the plans for the betrothal. It was soon realized during our five days together, however, that a big decision had to be made before we could move forward with our plans. The decision was whether or not Tali would finish nursing school. Was she going to finish the three months it would take to get her degree, or would we have the betrothal in January? To do both would be too much, because we wanted the time between the betrothal and the wedding to be devoted to preparation. If

Tali was going to finish school we would postpone the wedding until early summer. The prospects of waiting didn't appeal to me, but I was ready to submit to whatever decision was made.

At a certain point Mr. Kenny, Ms. Diane and Tali met to come to a conclusion. While they were talking, I went to the room Zac and I were staying in, to pray. For what seemed like a very long time I waited attentively for someone to bring the news. Finally, Mr. Kenny came to the door. I could hardly believe my ears when he told me that they had decided that Tali wouldn't go back to school. To Mr. Kenny's shock, I lunged through the doorway into his arms with one of the most excited hugs I had ever given. Then with ecstatic leaps of joy I bounced down the hallway toward the kitchen where the rest of the family was. Once in the kitchen, Ms. Diane had to caution me not to hit my head on the ceiling, I was jumping so high! Bursting out the door into the icy cold, I ran and jumped while freely expressing my thankful heart to God. Back in the kitchen, I told Tali, who was also beaming with joy, "This changes everything!" Now we could start doing what we were originally thinking, planning for a mid-January betrothal. When Ms. Diane wanted to get a picture of us, I was standing about four feet away from Tali, so with one big stride I stood right by her. Even though we didn't touch each other, it was nonetheless amazing just to stand next to each other.

Right away I shared an idea of something we could do leading up to the betrothal. I asked, "What do you think about us seeing how many ways we can say how much we appreciate each other without saying 'I love you?'" Tali liked the idea and so began a season that I believe even Noah Webster would have approved of. We took advantage of every complimentary word we could think of. You're amazing, you're beautiful, you're wonderful, you're smart, you're extravagant, you're fabulous, you're graceful, etc. etc. We were thoroughly in love.



The excitement of entering into covenant with one another was mounting. Only a few short weeks and we would be betrothed! I would wake up in the morning with ideas filling my mind of new ways to show Tali my love for her. One morning I wrote a message for her in the snow. It was an unforgettable moment, standing there in the early morning sunlight and seeing Tali's face light up as she read what I had written. It was in this season that I understood what it means for love to be awakened as it says in Song of Songs 3:5. We enjoyed reading the love stories of the Bible together—Isaac and Rebecca, Boaz and Ruth. We were also able to read other passages pertaining to marriage. It was good to have a biblical foundation to build on.

Leaving each other was not something we were looking forward to as the trip wound to an end. Nevertheless, we were excited about what lay ahead of us. The plan was that in a few weeks, Tali would come down to Tennessee and we would finish writing our ketubah (vows) and finish planning the betrothal ceremony. As we exchanged parting words we both laughed and felt blessed beyond measure to see how the Father had grown our friendship in such a short period of time. I waved a kiss to Tali as we drove off; so ended a beautiful chapter in our journey toward betrothal.

As I waited for Tali's upcoming trip to Tennessee, my mind percolated with ways to bless her. One of the ideas came from Song of Songs 2:4, "He brought me to his house of wine and his banner over me is love." This Scripture had impacted me greatly in my walk with Yeshua. The truth of Yeshua's love being over me as a banner was something that had really softened and transformed my heart. Now I wanted Tali to know that my banner over her was love. Thus began the making of a love banner. It was made of a cloth about two feet wide and six feet long with the Hebrew letters written on it that spell "Ahavah" (love). It just so happened that there was also some glow-in-the-dark paint in

the shed, so I outlined the letters with it and hung it in a wide doorway inside the house. When Tali and her family arrived, we turned all the lights out to get the full glow-in-the-dark effect. She loved it. Our time together in Tennessee was full. We prayed, read the Word, and prepared for the betrothal. To emphasize the seriousness of the covenant we were about to enter into, we decided to get legally married. There was no hesitation in doing this; we both knew we were walking in the destiny God had laid before us.

A week before the betrothal, we had what we called an engagement party. This was a time for people to come and meet Tali and for us to share some about how God had brought us together.

Despite the inevitable ebb and flow of emotions that come with a romantic relationship, we felt secure being surrounded by family who supported us and held us accountable. If there is one thing the devil is out to destroy today, it is solid marriages. The enemy of your soul would like nothing more than to seduce you like the bird in Proverbs 7:23 who hastened to the snare, not knowing it would cost him his life. There is a life and death battle being fought when it comes to relational purity. We must be able to give a message of hope. Recently, a friend of mine told me the story of a large church that was teaching the importance of physical purity in their youth group. One of the young people asked the group leader, "Can you tell me of one couple in this church who kept themselves physically pure before marriage?" The leader was at a loss. Tragically, he could not think of a single couple who had saved themselves for each other.

A testimony has power. It gives strength to those who are seeking to resist the devil. Happily married couples are one of the best witnesses that can be given to our generation. We must understand the reason God wants healthy marriages and their importance to Him. The prophet Malachi says, "But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one?"

He seeks godly offspring” (2:15). As the enemy makes an all-out assault on biblical faith being passed from generation to generation through godly offspring, we must be aware of his tactics and fight to win. God desires healthy marriages because He desires godly offspring. The two are inseparable.

The day of the betrothal, we were still working on the ketubah. A few hours before the ceremony we finished it. I was greatly helped in getting an idea of what goes into ketubah-making from my dear friend, Yisrael, since he and his wife were the only couple I knew who had been betrothed, other than one other couple who were not yet wed. Their counsel was a great blessing to Tali and me. One of the ideas we got from Yisrael was to incorporate the Ten Commandments into the ketubah. Under each command we wrote how we would aspire to live it out in our marriage.

Based on Jeremiah 2:2, Jewish people see Mount Sinai as the place where Israel became betrothed to God. The verse says, “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord, ‘I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.’”” In this understanding, the Ten Commandments are seen as the ketubah or vows that Israel was to agree to in order to enter into covenant with God.

Tali and I split our ketubah into two halves; one side is the Ten Commandments, including our commitments to each one, and the other side is our personal vows to one another. We also had a place on the ketubah where Tali and I, along with our parents, signed as witnesses. It felt so momentous as we approached the evening of our betrothal. Soon we were going to share a full-on covenant. Up until the betrothal, there was always that slim outside chance that something would come up that would interfere. After the betrothal there would be no turning back. I sang this song for Tali that night:

My heart is full of passion as it finds this new expression, my beloved and my friend; to you I pledge my hand and this promise will endure,  
for I promise I am yours.

I am yours; today I want you to know to you I am pledged in faithfulness all my days in joy and in sorrow; I am yours.

Today I enter into this covenant with you. May our love for one another serve to be a picture of Yeshua and His bride. He’s calling us, saying  
I am yours.

Come what may, we were in agreement to be covenantal friends from that day forward. A shofar sounded to begin the betrothal ceremony. The setting was intimate, with no more than thirty people present as witnesses. We read this beautiful passage from Hosea, “I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the LORD” (Hosea 2:19-20). We also read a passage from Exodus 19:16-20 speaking of the Sinai betrothal of God to Israel. Then we had a time of worship. After Dad and Mom prayed for me, I offered Mr. Kenny the bride price and read 1 Corinthians 6:20, “For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” We decided to do the bride price because of the symbolic picture it gives of the price Yeshua paid for us. Next, Mr. Kenny was asked if he would give Tali to me in marriage, and then he asked Tali if she would go with me (Gen. 24:58). Tali responded wholeheartedly, “I will go!” Mr. Kenny and Ms. Diane prayed for Tali, and then she joined me under the chuppah (pronounce *kehoopah*, the “kh” making a guttural sound).

My brothers constructed the chuppah (a wooden frame holding my tallit that we stood under as we read our vows) on the

day of the betrothal. It was beautifully crafted from freshly cut cedar poles taken from the nearby forest. This is the point where we held hands for the first time. It was an exhilarating moment! It was also at this time that we first said “I love you” to each other. (Tali had picked up some Hebrew so we were able to say “I love you” in the resurrected language of the Bible!) I imagine you could have powered a nuclear plant from the energy produced between us during those first few seconds! We read our ketubah and then shared a cup of wine as a confirmation of our commitments. First I drank, and then offered the cup to Tali. When Tali drank there was much rejoicing, because like the bride of Yeshua who accepts His offer of the cup (Matthew 25:27-28), Tali and I were now covenantally betrothed. We then exchanged rings, broke bread together, and were pronounced husband and wife. Next the parents, grandparents and elders who were present gathered around Tali and me and prayed for us. Tali and I then anointed one another with oil, prayed, and washed each other’s feet. Our brothers and sisters shared some things they had prepared for us. Some were emotional and some were funny. They were all priceless.

After a little singing, we proceeded to have a feast. To remember Israel we decided to include what is known as the seven species in the meal. These are wheat, barley, grapes, figs, pomegranates, olives, and dates (Deut. 8:8). One more prayer time followed the meal. We finished praying, and while I was not looking forward to letting go of Tali’s hand, I knew it was time. I told Tali, “I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). We lingered at the door, hand in hand, trying to stretch out those last few moments as long as we could. Then I left, not knowing the day or hour when we would see each other again. “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but my Father only” (Matthew 24:36). This was a radical decision, but Tali and I were in total agreement: from the time of the betrothal we wanted to

separate until the undisclosed wedding day. We knew the general season, just not the day and hour. Dad agreed to be the one to announce the time for the wedding. Our goal was to portray the heartbeat of Yeshua as He waits for His bride.

Soon after the betrothal I began work on “the place,” while Tali returned to Pennsylvania to begin work on her wedding dress. We were separated by many miles physically, but our hearts were being irrevocably knit together with every love letter and every phone conversation we shared. The separation time turned out to be two and a half months. Early on, during that two and a half months, it was decided that the wedding would take place at some point over a set weekend, a three-day window of time.

With the help of many faithful friends and hardworking brothers, work on the house was steadily progressing. Miraculously, after weeks of focused effort to build the house, I received its final inspection the day before I left for the wedding! God’s timing is perfect! An unexpected blessing came when my childhood friend Noah came to help. I was so happy to share this season of my life with him. The week before the wedding, Noah and I were able to put some of the finishing touches on the house. Once we were through, we traveled to the wedding grounds together.

The trip turned out to be a memorable one. Here is a little background to help understand the following story. Noah is an amazing carpenter. His carpentry skill is even more remarkable when one knows all the obstacles he has overcome to develop it. As a young man, meningitis severely damaged Noah’s hearing and eyesight. At one point during the sickness, we were unsure whether Noah would even live, so we are thankful to God that He delivered Noah from death and also brought partial recovery to his body. So even though Noah knew how to drive, he only did so when necessary. We were only a few miles from the campground when suddenly my cell phone stopped working, and I had no way of knowing where Tali was. I knew she was at the campground; just where was the question. I certainly did not want to

be casually going through the campground and end up seeing her after waiting two-and-a-half months to reach the climax of the wedding. Therefore, the only option was for Noah to drive and for me to hunker down in the floorboard of the truck. We did end up passing Tali on the road, but thankfully, I was nowhere to be seen. The moral of the story is that when presented with two risks at once, a person must choose the one that will least likely spoil his dreams. The dream was still intact.

Now we waited: I for the release from my dad, and Tali for the sound of the shofar. We were in two different locations. Tali and most of the wedding guests were at the campground where the wedding would take place. Dad, my oldest brothers, and I were at a campground a few miles away. The one I was at was a campground specifically designed for people to bring their horses to ride trails. This happened to be a divine setup. The idea of riding in on a horse to meet Tali was one I really liked but had laid down, thinking it was an impossibility. Well, thanks to persistent brothers who went from site to site through the campground seeing if anyone would let us borrow their horse, what seemed impossible became reality. After several failed attempts, they came up to one site where a couple agreed to let us use their white horse. Amazingly, they were even leaving the campground at the time we would need the horse! There was nothing to worry about. It felt like God already had everything, even the smallest details, under complete control. Blessed be His glorious Name! At this point I knew the day, but was still waiting to know the hour. After spending some time in the Word, and being encouraged by Dad, we prepared to leave the little cabin we were staying in. The time had come. With the energy of broncos let out of a chute, my brothers took off to spread the news. First they told Tali and then proceeded to let everyone else know. After a loud shofar blast, the announcement rang throughout the campground, “The bridegroom is coming!” Everyone knew from the time of the shofar’s blast they had one hour to get dressed and ready for the wedding.

The people with the horse showed up as they had said at a place less than half a mile from where Tali and the wedding guests were. Getting accustomed to the horse, I rode him around for a few minutes before going to meet Tali. Dad and I exchanged a few words, and then with his approval, I took off. My brothers ran alongside me as we went. With a round of shofar blasts, everyone was alerted to our advance. Nearing the place where everyone was assembled, I dismounted, and with joy full of glory, made quick strides toward Tali. She was so beautiful in her pure white linen dress! It felt like a dream. After all the weeks of waiting, we had finally reached this moment. We embraced, and with a sense of wonder, gave each other our first kiss. We were very preoccupied with one another for those fantastic first seconds. Then, pulling our eyes off each other, I greeted the family and friends who were all around us. Their loving and happy faces only added to the joy we already felt. The time had come; the procession was ready to begin.

“Are you ready to go?!” I shouted.

“Yes!” came the response.

Energetically I replied, “Let’s go!” With worship songs being lifted up, we began the procession to the gazebo where the ceremony would take place. Previously I had hung the “Ahavah” banner over the path between two trees. Once we reached and stood directly beneath the banner, I kissed Tali again. We were thoroughly in love! We arrived at the gazebo situated near a sparkling lake.

Once everyone got settled, the ceremony began. Dad shared an inspiring message on the importance of covenant. Our sisters did a dance to a beautiful song Tali had written called “In Love.” Tali and I reaffirmed our vows by reading our ketubah. We also did a salt covenant, which is mentioned a few times in the Bible (Leviticus 2:13; 2 Chronicles 13:5). What we did was combine two bags of salt; one was mine, and the other was Tali’s. The



symbolic meaning was that as hard as it would be for us to put the grains of salt back into their original sacks, so it would be just as hard to separate Tali and me. After the ceremony, we had a time of joyous dancing. Our families joined us as we danced around in a circle. It was an all-out celebration!

Then there was the reception where we were able to greet our friends and family. It was wonderful to share our joy with so many we loved. Exhausted, Tali and I left before most everyone else. We heard the next morning that people kept dancing until nearly midnight. We were glad to be by ourselves after such an action-packed day. The drive was only a few miles to the place where we spent our first few days together. After that, we came back to Kenlake (the campground where the wedding took place) and stayed in a cabin. In between spending quality alone time, we were also able to participate in the family event that was going on the week after our wedding. I remember reading through the Song of Solomon that first week together. The book's poetic language of love began to find its way into our vocabulary. I would call Tali "Ahuvi" (my beloved) and she would call me "Khatani" (my bridegroom).

By the time the campout came to an end, Tali and I were eager to head off to the place I had prepared in Tennessee. Tali had not yet seen any of the work on the house, so I was very excited to see how she would like it. On the drive down, I taught Tali how to say most of the colors in Hebrew. That proved to be the first of many Hebrew lessons we would do over the following year. We arrived at the house late in the afternoon. Before carrying Tali over the threshold, I asked her to close her eyes. I carried her inside and then sat down on the couch in the living room. The surprise on Tali's face when she opened her eyes was priceless. The last time she had seen the house, it was nothing more than an empty shell. Now it was a home. My goal was to spend as much time as possible at home during our first year. We desired

to do this based on Deuteronomy 24:5 that says, "When a man has taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war or be charged with any business; he shall be free at home one year, and bring happiness to his wife whom he has taken." In order to do this, we decided to live as frugally as possible. This was not too hard. We did very little traveling, raised a garden, and had a good neighbor whom I did some work for in trade for milk and eggs. Plus, there was a creek running through the valley that was full of watercress!

The watercress became a point of mild contention between us after Tali became pregnant with our daughter, Yael. I found out very quickly that cooking breakfast only wins points when the food tastes good. Watercress, no matter how much I tried to promote its great health benefits, was intolerable to Tali's pregnant taste buds. Unable to convince Tali to appreciate the food that I liked, we ended up going to the store and stocking up on "mommy food." That year, thanks to a patient and loving wife, I learned some of the basics of what it means to "make your wife happy." It was quite an adventure. We continually learned new things about one another and found our love ever deepening. Five years later I can truly say that it only gets better. We are more in love today than ever. At this time we are blessed with three children. Yael (Jael) is four and is growing into a lovely little lady. She is becoming a big helper to Mommy. Keturah is two and keeps us thoroughly amused with her quirky sense of humor. Zephaniah is eight months. He is such a bundle of joy. We love them all so much, and we can hardly wait for news that we are expecting another!

At the end of that first year, the Father opened doors for us to study Hebrew in Jerusalem. Since then we have had many opportunities to teach others. When we look back at how the Father has led us, we know that He is the Author of our story. To Him be all glory and honor and praise! If you are single, may you be strengthened to wait on the One who already knows the "one"

you are to become one with. His plan for you is more romantic and exciting than anything you could ever come up with on your own. His way is the best!

## Tali's Story

It seems to me that our story begins way before the wedding, before the betrothal, even before Brayden and I met. Our Heavenly Father had a plan as He spoke the world into existence, and He knew that we would be a part of that plan. The miracle of how He brought us together increases our hope and gives us the faith to believe that His plan is truly good.

Kenneth and Diane Lupinacci, my amazing parents, have also experienced the goodness of God's plan. My parents both grew up in Italian Catholic households in Pennsylvania, but with very differing lifestyles. My father lived on a farm most of his life; my mother was born to a radiologist. They both led pretty average lives, doing what most other people around them did; hanging out with friends, dating, going to movies, going to parties, and going to church on Sundays. The Catholic church was a pretty defining part of both of their lives, but the emptiness of their lifestyles and the Catholic religion left my parents spiritually hungry for more. In the late 1970s God revealed more of Himself to each of them separately, and He brought them both out of the Catholic church.

My dad was thirty-five years old and single when he felt that he had his first major encounter with God. He left the Catholic church and began attending a home group Bible study where he made relationships that would build him up and encourage him in his faith. Before this time God was a distant thought, but now the Father was in the forefront of his life. The Bible study he attended was also special in that there was a major focus on Israel. As a thirty-eight-year-old lovable, sweet, single Christian man, my father had many friends working to find him a wife. He attended a 1982 New Year's Eve party at which he was introduced to a flamboyant Italian Christian talk show host in a gold sequin shirt named Diane DeLuise.

My mom graduated from college with a performing arts degree in the 70s and headed straight for Hollywood to try to “make it big” in acting. She experienced there a lifestyle that led to very dark places. Toward the end of the 70s, a friend of hers, who was an actress in a famous soap opera, took my mom to Jack Hayford’s church where she experienced God’s love and she gave her life to Him. She went through a radical change in a short amount of time. Her mother died of alcoholism shortly after that experience, so she left the Hollywood area and moved back to Pennsylvania. She was glad to be out of the Hollywood scene but didn’t know what to do outside of entertainment, so she and a friend of hers began a Christian talk show on a local TV channel. My mom was twenty-eight and single at the time, and she was fervently looking for a husband. She thought she was looking for a charismatic, charming man who would host the TV show with her, but the mention of any single man sparked her interest. The mention of a single Christian man is what inspired my mom to go to the New Year’s Eve party wearing her gold sequin shirt.

Their personalities were about as opposite as could be. My dad was quite shy and felt comfortable staying in the background. My mom, on the other hand, did not know what the background looked like. She spent quite a bit of time right in the middle of whatever was going on. My dad was intrigued by my mom’s enthusiasm for God; my mom was probably a little less impressed with my dad’s quiet demeanor. Despite the differences, they decided to give it a shot. Their first date was at the Messianic Jewish synagogue in Philadelphia with a group of friends. They had little time to converse between themselves, so they had their second date a week later. My mom says that during the drive on that second date, my dad did not say a single word for the entire two-hour ride! Thankfully, my mom was a seasoned talker and was able to fill up the silence just fine. They returned home from the restaurant they went to and decided to watch a Christian TV

show. They felt led to begin praying afterward and immediately went into some powerful prayers. Those prayers led to my father being filled with the Holy Spirit. Despite the major personality differences, they knew that God was doing something, and by the end of the night they knew that it was the Father’s will for them to get married. The news came as a shock to both of their families. Their parents thought that, after waiting all these years to be married, their children were marrying strangers. My parents had confidence that this was God’s will and they got married on June 5th, 1982.

This was the story we grew up with and it had a pretty big effect on me, especially as I walked through this betrothal process. While I am sure they did not do everything perfectly, they laid a foundation that I could build on. I hope that our story does the same for you.

I was born on July 16th, 1983 and two sisters followed behind me: Angela (1986), and Kendra (1989). After the long wait, our parents finally had a family and were overflowing with love for each other and love for us. Family life was very sweet. My earliest memories were reading Christian picture books with Mom and Dad before bed, memorizing Bible verses, having home group meetings, etc. We made many visits to see our grandparents, but most of our time was spent with our church family. Playing “house” was a common game in our children’s church group and I remember getting a plastic engagement ring from one of the little boys. There was another little boy I remember dancing with at a church wedding. Our moms took pictures and talked jokingly about the potential match.

When I began school, my parents decided to send me to a Christian school. My mom visited the school regularly and got a job driving her Chevy Suburban “school bus” to my school with other students. All of my friends knew my mom. My parents were more involved in my activities than most of my friends’ parents,



but my friends became a bigger and bigger part of my life. In third grade, a group of us students thought it would be fun to pair off and pretend to be couples off of a popular TV show everyone watched. It was all a game. The game probably lasted a couple weeks before everyone moved on to the next game, but my little match seemed to stick more so than the other ones. In third grade the match was obviously looked at as childhood innocence. We would write through the summer and hang out in school together. We both came from strong Christian homes, so our parents didn't think it was a bad idea. It was probably just looked at as childish fun. As the years went on, the relationship impacted my mind more and more. We rarely held hands and never went on "dates," but we definitely had each other's attention and were a known pair in class. By the time I got to eighth grade (twelve years old), my mind and heart were pretty involved. In my mind it didn't seem like it would ever change. Much to my surprise, during the eighth grade school year, the attention that I was so used to getting began shifting to another girl in the class. I didn't know what to do with this new situation. At first it wasn't too big of a deal. This other girl was funnier and tougher than I was, so I thought maybe if I tried to be tougher and funnier I would be able to win back his attention. That tactic did not work, even though I tried it for another year or so. At this point I lost hope, and my attention was drawn to someone else during my freshmen year.

He went to my youth group and was a musician in a "Christian" band. The style of music that he played was new to me, so I quickly became acquainted with a number of new bands that I never knew existed before. His older sister was a professional model and was well known for her latest "fashions" wherever she went. I was introduced to many new worlds at this time—fashion, art, theatre, music. My parents watched me go through many changes at this time, and they probably got a bit worried.

I dressed very differently, listened to different music, and hung out with different people, but I was still very close to my sisters and parents and everything that I was involved in still had the "Christian" label. Eventually my parents were convinced not to get too worried because they had heard that teenagers go through these "stages" and it is normal.

The young man and I began dating while I was still a freshman (fourteen to fifteen years old). We decided that we were "not going to kiss until we got married." The idea to keep physical distance sounded like a "safe" call, but even the talk about marriage put my heart in a very vulnerable position. Our parents were involved, as most of our "dates" were at each other's houses or spent at shows with his older sister. I can't say my parents were too thrilled by the match, but again, he was from a good Christian family and we were still young. The whole time we dated I was scared of the rejection that I had faced earlier, therefore, my personality was quite inhibited. Much to my dismay, my fears were realized when he wrote a letter to me six months later, breaking off the relationship. This one caused tears, but I again held on to some hope that he would change his mind even though I probably only saw him a handful of times over the following years. At this point, my life took an even more major turn.

My mom found out that I could sing when I was in fourth grade, and due to her performing arts background, she encouraged me to pursue it. Although this was uncomfortable to my shy personality, I ended up being in every school musical from that time on. The first community theatre play I took part in was when I was about fifteen, and it was a whole new ball game. I did well and enjoyed the attention I got from it, so I talked with my parents about transferring to public high school for my junior and senior year because they offered more opportunities in the performing arts area. Public school also had many art classes, which was another subject I was becoming more involved in.

Family finances were tight because Mom had just lost her job as a school bus driver, so we agreed it would be a good idea. I began public school in my junior year.

The year began with me making many observations of this new world, but I didn't work up the courage to engage too much. As the year progressed, I became heavily involved in choir. I got a lead role in the yearly school musical, and was involved in many art classes. I gradually made friends in school who shared common interests; art, music, and theatre. Before long, I was completely immersed in this new world. In that same year, I became much more involved in community theatre musicals. I took dance classes and went to art shows and music shows. The music I listened to was no longer only Christian, and the people I spent most of my time with in school were no longer only Christians. As the music I listened to went from strange to stranger and from dark to darker, so did the movies I watched. My hair went through many changes at this time with different colors and cuts and I even wore wigs from the theatre to school a couple times. The clothing I wore was pretty different and got more immodest as time went on. My dad quietly stated his opinion during my high school years. I knew he didn't like my dyed and cut hair and a lot of my clothing, but they weren't major objections. He hung a picture of me with my natural hair on the wall and would tell people when they came to our house, "This is what she REALLY looks like." I thought he didn't understand my "creative" personality. It did not take long for me to stick out in school. I was always a quiet personality but my clothes spoke loudly and so did the characters I played in the school musicals. The yearbook for my senior year shows Talitha Lupinacci voted by the entire senior class as "Most unique" and "Most likely to be in show business."

Our family had found our church "home" back in 1986 when I was three. It was/is a small non-denominational congregation in Quakertown, Pennsylvania. Although the names and the meeting places changed regularly, the same core group of people hung

in there through the shifting. To this day we have a very special relationship with this core group, even though many of us have moved to different places.

My sister and I joined the church's worship team when I was about twelve (my sister was nine). We grew up on the worship team at church. We began with singing, but eventually learned to play guitar, piano, bass, and drums, and sing harmony as there was need. Folks at the church watched me go through changes: first as I entered Christian high school, and then as I entered public school. Some lighthearted comments were made every once in a while about my clothing or about the movies I was watching, but unfortunately, I did not take them to heart. I think my heavy involvement in church kept my parents from worrying too much. Our church also had a big emphasis on outreach, so when I entered public school and began acting in community plays, I thought it was a perfect opportunity to be a light to the world. I held on to this goal for many years, but I had no idea about the kind of darkness that was out there. Two years of public school brought much confusion into my life. At fifteen, I thought that it would be a neat idea to save my first kiss until marriage. I held onto the idea for a short time, but I had no encouragement to walk it out and definitely didn't have an example to follow. By the time I turned seventeen, I was an oddball to everyone around me, even my friends in church. As I tried my best to be a light, I ended up in some foolish situations on my own, and, in the midst of the confusion, I reluctantly gave up my first kiss. At this point one of my youth leaders, Christy, saw the burden I was bearing, and she came to my side to help. She had a strong salvation testimony, and she began witnessing to my friends. I brought a vast variety of friends to church around this time and my two best friends became Christians. I was repentant for getting physically involved with someone. At this point church became an even bigger focus. I felt an urge to seek God more seriously, but as I sought Him I

also became even more heavily involved in theatre and the arts. I couldn't understand the confusion and darkness that I felt in my spirit even though I was seeking God more. I did not see the influence the world had on my life until I came out from it years later. My senior year of high school was probably one of the darkest years of my life. I was confused, and I didn't feel like I could get out from under it. I looked forward to the end of high school and a chance for a new beginning.

As my involvement in theatre grew, so did my interest in New York City. My dad plainly stated his thoughts on NYC: "I wouldn't go there if you paid me to go!" That did not stop me, however, as I blamed his opinion on his farm upbringing. In high school, I began taking regular trips to visit New York and see Broadway shows, either with my mom and sisters or with friends. Talk began about college and we began discussing the options of majoring in performing or visual arts. I auditioned for a few professional musicals in New York, but there was too much competition, so we decided it would be better to go to a school for the visual arts. Because of my "artsy" clothing, my art teacher encouraged me to look into fashion design and maybe eventually get into costume design. It sounded like a good idea, so I ended up starting college in Philadelphia to major in Fashion Design, but after three semesters I decided to make the move to a college in New York. It was a dream-come-true at the time, to be living in the middle of this massive city.

During my years in college, I was heavily involved in school but I always made sure to have a three-day break so I could make the two-hour trip to Pennsylvania every weekend to see my family and play on the worship team at church. I stayed pretty distant from other students because of the experience I had gone through in high school, but I made one very important friend. She was from Israel, and we connected very quickly as she taught me the Hebrew alphabet while we waited for subways together. I ended

up moving into an apartment with her and another Israeli friend for my last semester. I graduated from fashion design school with an Associate Degree and began looking for a job. As I went job hunting, I became less and less impressed with New York and the fashion world. I decided to move back to my Pennsylvania home.

My uncle and his family had started a restaurant/resort on Nevis, an island in the West Indies, many years before. My cousin was in town soon after I moved back to Pennsylvania, and he asked me if I would be interested in coming down for a few months to make uniforms for their workers. I had no job, I was done with school, and I thought it would be a good opportunity to spend time with family that I rarely saw, so I decided to take him up on the offer. This would be the longest stretch of time that I would be separated from my family and our church. We had begun reading about the pagan roots of Christianity right before I left, and I went down knowing that I could no longer celebrate Easter and Christmas. However, it left me with many questions about my faith and put me in a very vulnerable position.

In Nevis, I was introduced to people from many countries all over the world and heard many stories. The main resort manager was an agnostic man from Scotland, and the general atmosphere there was very humanistic. From the day I arrived, I was showered with questions about my faith and Christianity. The questions were challenging, but again I took this on as an opportunity to be a light. I gave witnessing my best shot, but my own list of questions about Christianity became longer and longer as time continued. My belief in God and the Bible did not wane, but I was discouraged to find that I didn't know a whole lot about either one. It had a wearing effect on me as the months went on, and I again found myself in the midst of confusion and foolish situations. I again got into bad relationships and made even more major compromises on my convictions. I left the island and returned home in the darkest place spiritually I had been in my whole life. I was ready for change.

I was glad to return home and be free from the many temptations that were on the island. I was repentant for all the compromises I had made, but I felt the weight of all my bad decisions. On top of it all, I felt a total lack of direction. I had already wasted several years and a lot of money on school for a career I decided wasn't for me. I had also pretty much walked away from theatre and performance after a bad experience. My parents encouraged me to be able to support myself as they were both getting older, so we decided that a nursing career would be the most practical choice. During my first semester of prerequisites, I got a call from my Israeli friend from New York, inviting me to go to Israel with her to visit family. Excitement built as I discovered that the time frame happened to be right over my spring break. My parents were a little hesitant and needed a bit of encouragement from some Israel-loving friends. In the end, they felt like it was the Father's will for me to go. Because traveling to Israel was a lifelong dream, I couldn't believe it was actually happening, and I had no idea what was in store for me there.

The plane landed at Ben Gurion Airport and I met my friend at the greeters' hall. We boarded a *sheroot* (taxi) to Jerusalem, and I sat next to an elderly Jewish woman. Something incredible happened to me as I was talking to her. The conversation itself was of no real significance, but it was in that moment that I felt like God gave me His heart for His Land and His people. Would I be a part of what God was doing on this earth, or would I try to keep chasing my own ideas and worldly dreams? Throughout the whole trip, I felt that God was making a presentation to me, and even though I spent most of the trip with non-religious Jews, it was a spiritual awakening for me. The two weeks went by, and I flew back to the States with direction. I knew that God would bring me back.

This first trip to Israel was the biggest turning point of my life. Major shifting started taking place. Back home, I returned

to school, but in my heart I seriously wondered if that was what God had in store for me. I talked to my parents about quitting school, but all I had to offer was a new excitement to learn about the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. The next practical step I was to take was very unclear. Maybe I would volunteer for the Israeli army as a nurse? We decided it would be best to keep pursuing a nursing career, but I was on a mission. I visited local Messianic congregations and attended conferences, trying to get in contact with anyone and everyone that had been to Israel. At the same time, my friend, Christy, shared her heart with me about modesty and introduced me to the *Above Rubies* magazine. I began getting a vision for being a wife and mother. How was Israel going to work in with all of that? An excitement to see God's plan unfold in my life began to grow in me. Movies and music that I used to listen to began to make me feel spiritually slimed, and I realized that investing my time in them was counterproductive. God's plan was going to take every bit of my life, and He had brought me to a place where I was not only ready for it—I was excited about it.

One very important issue of *Above Rubies* came out that had a picture of a little boy praying at the Western Wall. I was so excited to read about the Waller family's ministry called HaYovel, and I immediately ordered a documentary about them called *A Journey Home*. Tears streamed down my face as I watched the story of their fight for purity and their love for Zion. Out of all the ministries and Israel connections I had made, my heart made an immediate connection to this family and this work. I wrote an email to Mrs. Sherri Waller, sharing my heart to return to the Land, and I stated in the email, "I would love to be a part of what you are doing." HaYovel sent out an email shortly after, inviting people to come to Tennessee to celebrate Passover with the family and friends. We already had planned a trip to Texas around that time, so I talked to my whole family about making the trip