

BELIEF *By Katheryn Barlow-Williams*

# God does not guarantee success, just divine love

Recently, I read the obituary of a childhood friend, and I wasn't sad just because she died. I was devastated because she never lived. The missing words conveyed more about her than the few written ones. A string of bad choices, lost dreams and heartbreak dangled quietly between the haunted lines.

Even the briefest obituary speaks volumes. Each personal detail serves as a title of an unwritten chapter. Employment, survivors, preceded in death, community service and religion are just a few titles found in obituaries. The full chapters are written on the hearts of



**Katheryn Barlow-Williams tells of the loss of a childhood friend.**

the deceased's loved ones.

While credentials and awards can be impressive, they are ultimately meaningless if a life is void of healthy relationships. Faith, forgiveness, patience and courage quietly weave through the chapters of a rich, meaningful life. Long after someone has passed, the memory of those qualities inspires and comforts grieving loved ones.

Monica's obituary (I've

changed her name for publication) made it clear that she had not lived well. Similar to fireworks that misfire and are swallowed by darkness instead of bursting with light, Monica's life disintegrated. The obituary indicated that she loved to paint and had completed several pieces of art but was never employed as an artist. She attended a college, but did not graduate. She was a faithful Christian, but not a church member. No funeral was held.

Only her family of origin was included in the list of survivors. She never married or had children. To be clear, a

woman need not be a wife or mother to be fulfilled, but there was little else to explain who or what Monica loved. There was not even a suggestion for a memorial contribution to a favorite charity.

After reading the cursory account of her 53 years, I wondered, "What happened to the smart, witty, beautiful girl I knew?" Though more social than academic, we had big dreams for our futures. She was an artist, and I was a writer. Undaunted by the odds stacked against us, we couldn't wait to leave home to discover our destinies.

When I went to college,

we lost touch and our lives would not intersect again until my brother sent me her obituary. According to mutual friends, drugs and alcohol had spun Monica's life out of control, and she finally crashed.

I do not know why one person grows through adversity and another one is crushed. The life of faith offers no guarantees or explanations, only promises. God does not guarantee our success, safety or even happiness. God gives us something far better, the promise that divine love dwells within us and nothing can take it away.

A lifetime of bad choic-

es or hard knocks does not push us beyond God's reach.

Recovering alcoholic and writer Ann Lamott said it best: "I do not understand the mystery of grace — only that it meets us where we are and does not leave us where it found us."

I pray that grace met my friend at death and carried her to peace.

May grace meet us where we are today and write a story of love to hang on the details of our daily lives.

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