

DIVINE PROVIDENCE

When I survived the wreck that took my wife and son, I wondered why I was spared? Why was I left here all alone? In an effort to keep my mind off of that horrible night, I agreed to help with projects at Broadway Baptist Church where I attended.

It was at one of those events I saw Keera Nystrom for the first time. She was sitting on the ground breastfeeding Daniel, her tiny infant. “Would you like to come inside? We have a nursery where you could sit more comfortably.”

“No thank you. I’ll wait here.”

Wait here meant she was first in line for one of the free meals being served every Thursday to the homeless. As one of the volunteers, I arrived early and stayed late, doing whatever needed to be done.

Did this young girl and her baby have a place to live, I wondered? During a slack moment I sat in a nearby chair. “Hi, I’m Ben Jenkins, I haven’t seen you here before. Is this your first time?”

“Yes.”

“I hope you are enjoying tonight’s meal. I always love meatloaf night. It is one of my favorites.” Although she was reluctant to talk, I learned that she lived in an old travel trailer behind Danielson’s Trucking. The owner allowed her to stay there. “I could get you into a

women's shelter. You and the baby, I mean. They could arrange for you to get financial help; to buy formula and diapers, and so forth."

"Thanks, but no. I'm managing." How, I wondered? Not only did I feel sorry for Keera, but the baby—the poor baby.

Week after week, Keera was not among the fifty or so individuals who showed up for free food. I drove to Danielson's Trucking to see if I saw any sign of her and the baby. The trailer was dark, so I found the night watchman and asked him about their tenant.

"An ambulance came after her a couple of days ago, so she may be in the hospital."

"Hospital! What about the baby?"

"I have no idea."

After several calls, I discovered she was in the Doctor's Hospital, so I headed that direction. The lady at the front desk said she was in intensive care. Visiting hours were from 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. I had ten minutes. Walking as fast as I could, I saw the big double doors leading into ICU. Once inside, I walked from cubicle to cubicle until I found her. She looked so pale, so sick. During our brief time, I told her I was concerned about her and the baby. She smiled, but remained silent. She was too ill to talk. "I'll be back tomorrow." and I headed for the double doors.

Over the next few days, I visited Keera as often as I could. She did improve enough to be moved to a regular room, but she was still very ill; a lung infection, she was told. On one of my visits she asked if I could see why the foster care people hadn't brought Daniel to see her. They said they would, but they hadn't.

"I will see what I can do."

A great deal of wrangling took place, but I did finally get to talk to the lady who had Daniel. She promised she would take him to see his mother. Keera wept when she told me about their time together.

“Ben,” Keera said one of the days I sat by her bedside, “I want you to raise Daniel. It is obvious you are a kind, loving person. Please take care of my son. He deserves better than I’ve given him.”

“You’re going to get better,” I kept telling her. She did get better, but the infection weakened her system to such a degree that she never fully recovered. Knowing she could no longer live by herself, I moved her into my home. In order for me to continue to raise little Daniel, we married April 4th, 2003, and in four short months she passed away.

Here it is August 5, 2018, and I’m taking my son to get his learner’s permit. It’s hard to believe that fifteen years have passed since I leaned over, kissed Keera’s forehead and told her I loved her, then watched as she breathed her last. I’m so thankful I heeded our pastor’s urging and helped with the weekly meals. Otherwise, I would never have met Keera and Daniel.