

# Inspirations

The ACTS Foundation Bulletin for "Wednesday Women Warriors & Mighty Meditating Men"

#786/ Overcoming Obstacles  
by Jewel VanValin / narnia4@verizon.net / 2<sup>nd</sup> week of September 2011



I was 14, when diagnosed with dyslexia. Despite the fact my father did all possible, as a physician, to research and have me tested, there seemed to be nothing they could come up with, that explained why I could not learn, retain, or read information properly... If it were not for my family's kidding me, their support, their love and the love from the Lord I would not be the positive person I am today. My hometown, Solvang, California was like any American small town in the 50's and 60's. Solvang was unique in that it was made up of mainly Danish immigrants. Danish was spoken

in every social setting in those days. Many of the shop owners of Solvang were Danish, dressed Danish and spoke it. Most of their wares were imported from Scandinavia. The street we lived on just below town center was called Old Mill Road, which my parents helped name with the other two families that lived on this street at the time, the Rasmussens and the Sorensens. Fred Sorensen built a great windmill on his property and oversaw much of the Danish style building done in the town. My parents moved to Solvang in 1948, when there was a call for a doctor to practice in the Santa Ynez Valley. In 1950 they built a barn styled two-story home for us in a private neighborhood at the base of the gorgeous ten thousand acre, rolling hills Alisal Ranch. The view from our home was beautiful on all fronts.

I was the forth and last child born to my parents. We grew up like most kids growing up in the Santa Ynez Valley with bikes, horses and seemingly unlimited land to roam and freely play. The Alisal was our backyard. We took full advantage of riding, hunting, fishing and swimming on this beautiful and pristine land. It was my heaven on earth. I still walk my dog along some of those same grounds today and find now, as I did throughout my childhood, a precious sense of God's presence in the Valley. Our home, horse barn, and surrounding acreage became my refuge and sanctuary from the challenges that lay ahead with my learning disabilities. I did not talk until I was 4. Being the youngest, it seemed that everyone in the family could sense what I needed, so there wasn't much for me to say. As time went on and my quietness was more evident my parents realized that there must be something not right with my developmental stages. I did cry a lot out of frustration. I was not able to tell my family what was wrong, or why I didn't understand a simple request whether in action or requiring a reply. There just seemed to be confusion in stating how I felt, or what I needed.

The only place to find order and balance for me was riding my pony, Bronco, through the hills, or when I played with my plastic cowboys and indians. These activities could entertain me for hours and I was content and happy playing by myself. In these settings, I was never alone for as long as I can remember, my mother shared the love of Christ with me. He was my personal, constant companion. Never did I feel alone or unloved. There was an inner assurance that He was beside me. In my quiet endeavor to know that whatever was going on with my inability to learn, I had an amazing inner knowing that Christ would always protect and keep me near Him. It has been the constant thread interwoven in my life so still to this day, He is my constant companion. I abide in Him and He in me.

Schooling was incredibly difficult. I started Kindergarten in 1959 at our local Solvang Elementary School. I remember so clearly how lost and afraid I felt. Not that I hadn't been exposed to social setting, for being a doctor's daughter, we attended many functions in town, as well as my father made many house calls and occasionally he took me along, so I knew how to interact with people to the best of my ability. But, in school I was suddenly on my own without my family to be there in a new environment called a class with other children my age. Questions were asked of me that I didn't know how to answer. Fear gripped me. It was an overwhelming experience for me especially in those first days and weeks for there were instructions that I had to follow without any coaxing from family nor the opportunity to ask my mom to explain what was being required of me. School was a strange new setting where my inabilities were exposed. I felt transparent. Confusion would best describe my early years in school for I did not understand the alphabet, or structure of words on a page. I knew well the pictures in many of our library children's books. At home my parents read to us. I could tell you what was on each page of the book before you turned to the next picture. I could memorize these patterns quickly. The pictures made sense, but not the words. How was I going to recite the alphabet, or numbers? What was required of me seemed too beyond my reach.

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As schooling continued I was lost in the structure and comprehension of subjects and their lessons. I remember vividly once in second grade when the teacher asked me a question in math, and I was still focusing on last hour's science lecture, so I blurted out something from that day's science lecture. Transitioning from subject to subject in the same day was

beyond my grasp. I was still struggling with understanding the setequence of the alphabet numbers and now new information was being thrown at me and I had no place in which to store it. The alphabet was letters lined up which in my mind had no pictures associated with them and no connection between them so they were a jumble to me. Couldn't there be a picture by each letter that helped identify them, let alone how do you pronounce the jumble of letters when they are separated into words?

My father became my tutor. In the evenings he would spend hours with me trying to help me understand the homework assignments. He never lost his patience. He would take all the time diagramming, drawing pictures for me so I could get concepts. Never did I hear an unkind word from him or anyone in my family that caused me to feel that I was stupid or lazy. They were supportive and loving. The kidding they did was always in fun and love. This meant everything to me. As my schooling continued, my learning disabilities became more blatant especially when the stacks of homework increased. Still, nightly, my father helped me. When I had a test on any given day, Dad would get me up early that morning to go over the subject matter before the school day would commence. Dad's love and care made it really easy for me to later rely on my Heavenly Father. Often in exams, I would hear my father's voice going over the homework. I would actually picture answers on the page of my study guide at home. Still, I was not always able to connect the dots to the correct answer. It was so frustrating, yet, I never gave up. Neither did my parents. They were always looking for help for me. Family friends, Dr. Raymond Cramer and his wife Nula, felt that I perhaps had dyslexia. My parents arranged a visit for me to be tested. My mother and I drove to the Cramers' city together. Dr. Cramer ran a series of tests and he was able to confirm that I had this learning disability. It was so releasing and exciting for me when someone was finally able to label my struggle and define it for us. It made sense and I felt a freedom that I had never felt before. I know the Cramers were an answer to my family's prayers. For me, now there was name to a question that pondered my mind ever since I could remember. I wasn't stupid, there was a scientific reason why I could not read, write, or learn.

Dyslexia is difficult to handle because it can keep you at a distance in relationships since you are not always understood by your peers. You do get laughed at by others sometimes and the kidding of friends and strangers is not like your family's kidding. Outsiders' kidding can often feel cruel and unjust. Someone with a learning disability can't defend themselves because deep inside they know there is something definitely wrong with their ability to learn, but they can't articulate it. Trust me, you feel and look normal but you know in your heart you aren't. Sometimes, nothing makes sense.

My journey wasn't easy growing up as a child, but, I would not change anything that I went through because it has made me who I am today. Yes, it was at times painful and extremely difficult, but, never did I feel like giving up on learning what I did not understand. I consider myself a positive dyslexic. I realize now God gave me a gift, not a stumbling block. I believe He has enabled me to meet the learning challenges put before me so that others can benefit from my journey. Learning to grasp concepts for a dyslexic can be disheartening at times, but, God has helped me to understand that although I may see life a little differently than most, still this disability has been a gift and quite rewarding. It has developed character in me and I value life deeply. I know I am not perfect and I have a dependency on God because I have needed Him in my adult life just as I needed Dad to help me through elementary and high school studies. For certain I know I have compassion for others because I have thrived on it myself.

Never giving up has been one of the most important lesson for me. So many more tools are out there now for people to learn how to deal with dyslexia, then when I was growing up. For those of you that do have this or any learning disability, I will tell you to never give up! I can testify that with a strong relationship with the Lord, we can succeed no matter what challenge life hands us. He will lovingly and personally guide us through every endeavor. Sometimes disabilities are not detected because they are like "invisible wheelchairs". I trust my story is an encouragement to you if you struggle in any area of life. I trust it is a reminder to us all to be sensitive and helpful to anyone who deals with a handicap of any kind, even dependency on drugs or alcohol. Introducing people to Christ is the best supportive, lifelong gift we can give to them. He never leaves us and He always understands and makes a way for us in every challenge life deals us.

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I pray for all the www/mmm families faithfully. The weekly prayer and teaching letters were started in my livingroom in Solvang because my cousin, Susan McIntosh, and I were interceding together for family and friends and God gave us a Scripture focus each week. By July of 1998 we were seeing answers to prayer so we began to share the weekly prayer formats with others. Now intercessors from 38 countries are joining us each week at the throne of God to pray for one another. Bless you today and be assured that no matter what your challenge in life is this week, Jesus has the answers and the resources to meet your needs. Our Heavenly Father loves us dearly. Jesus is praying for us. The Holy Spirit is now my

private tutor. He is my teleprompter! Ask Him for assistance today. Lean into Him. Keep the eyes and ears of your heart open to Him. I'll be praying for you. Send a note to my email if you'd like prayer. I am a flight attendant for Delta Airlines/Northwest Airlines. Maybe you'll be on one of my flights one day and we can meet, otherwise, see you in Heaven if not before. Jewel VanValin, an ACTS Foundation, Inc. Board Member

## ***Wheelchair***

*My "wheelchair" you'll never see,  
It secretly belongs to me,  
I use it often—unbeknown,  
Trembling, truly, were it known.*

*I also search for special ramps,  
For wider doors, and brighter lamps,  
My "darkness" makes it harder still,  
To navigate with secret skill.*

*The past has often hampered me,  
And made it hard for me to see,  
The loving Guide who takes my hand,  
And safely leads through sinking sand.*

*You too may have a "wheelchair"  
And feel that things are fierce, unfair,  
Your life may stress and draw you down,  
But hope there is if you're His own.*

*So let Him be your special ramp,  
Your wider door, and brighter lamp,  
For darkness flees when His light shines,  
He shows the way with loving signs.*

*Ralph E. McIntosh © 1984*

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