

SERVANT



KEVIN AND JULIA GARRATT
CAPTIVE IN CHINA

MARK MAXWELL
**SUPPLY CHAIN
EVANGELISM**

ALUMNI IN ACTION
**SERVICE ON THE
HIGH SEAS**

**HOPE
IN THE
SHADOWS**

Issue 104 | Spring 2019

WHEN GOD SHOWS UP

Supply chain evangelism

A FEW WEEKS AGO ONE OF OUR PROFESSORS SENT ME AN EMAIL SAYING

that he has sometimes valued his family's overseas mission work and its impact more than his current role on our College faculty. Quite to the contrary, in my heart I was convinced that the influence he projected within the classroom would infiltrate culture far beyond these walls.

be that God does not want them to support us. But I would strongly suggest that our school is a *vital* link in the chain of reaching the world with the good news of God's love because we have the single objective of making disciples and building his kingdom.

job done. We do our part so that people from every tribe and nation in the world will become Lovers of God and followers of the LORD Jesus Christ. We are all "mission-critical."

Let me say this with great confidence: The LORD has need of you and your talents. You have a very important role to play in God's plan to reach the world with his love. I responded to our professor by saying, "I can only imagine



That got me thinking. In the mission of building God's kingdom, the perception that any of us are more important, or doing more important work than someone else, introduces hierarchy, which is grounded in a misunderstanding of the King, and therefore, bad theology. God needs each one of us in the supply chain that he is building to reach the world and he values each of us equally in our roles. According to Paul's letters to the Romans and the Corinthians, God has given each of us gifts that are needed by the others in this great body of believers. Some of us are teachers, some helpers, givers or encouragers, some craftsmen or musicians, preachers or evangelists.

I know of donors who will only give to "evangelistic work" and therefore they feel that Prairie does not qualify. It might

Whatever is needed to build the Church, the Holy Spirit will provide through immediate and direct intervention. We may not feel particularly special because we are not front line "evangelists."

We are all mission-critical.

There are, however, two high callings on each of us individually: that we call Jesus LORD to the glory of God the Father, and that we are faithful in our place in the supply chain. The mission of the Almighty is the redemption of all creation, and we are part of his redemptive plan, each of us in our own unique way. Some of us plant, some water, some weed, some harvest—but all of us are needed to get the

the amount of influence you and your team will have around the world through your students. You are kingdom-building in a way that will only be known decades from now."

I hope you are encouraged today, encouraged to stay the course, to be faithful in the small things and courageous when times are tough, so that God's supply chain will be unbroken and the world will know the almighty love of the Father. ✎



Mark is available to speak to your church or organization. Reach him at mark.maxwell@prairie.edu

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LETTERS

Thank you for the article “The Journey” in *SERVANT* Issue 103 regarding the young girl with Lyme disease. I have been fighting this illness for the last twenty-seven years and was very grateful to read of her successful treatment and that awareness is growing. It is very seldom that I see something like this addressed in Christian literature and I appreciated it.

Neil Martin, Tucson, AZ

Re “Embracing the Faith” (Issue 103).

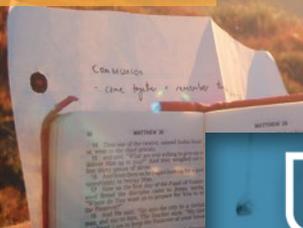
There are definite principles in God’s Word to raise our children the right way. These truths have provided timeless guidance and assistance to children becoming godly adults through the ages. But these are helps, not guarantees. God the Father did everything he could for his beloved child Israel. Yet to this day, his beloved is still not walking in his ways. Does that mean that God is a failure as a parent? Our all-wise, all-compassionate Parent did everything he could, yet, ultimately his child chose another way. We would do well to remember this when we share “fool-proof” principles that have resulted in all our children walking with the Lord. We must hold the tension between the power of God and human willfulness. So, dear parents who have children in rebellion, take heart. You know the Father heart of God more than most.

Greg and Heidi Croal, Lakefield, ON



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never alone

At 7:02 in the evening on August 4, 2014, time stopped for Kevin and Julia Garratt. As they stepped out of a restaurant elevator in Dandong, China, they were rushed and seized by plain clothes agents who crowded them into waiting cars and spirited them away into the night. The two Canadians and long-time aid workers had disappeared without warning into the dark side of a labyrinth of 1.4 billion people.

Just before their wedding in 1984, Kevin Garratt and his fiancée Julia had received an invitation to come and teach in a Chinese university. The country was in a period of reform and China was recruiting and graciously welcoming foreign experts, particularly those who could teach English. It was a dream come true for the young couple. Every day brimmed with new experiences and they were mesmerized by the people and the culture. China's heartbeat soon became their own.

After a time back in Canada for further education and the births of their son and daughter, the Garratts were invited to Hong Kong to assist foreign teachers. From there, doors opened to other cities and they found themselves filling a multitude of roles, including partnering with an orphanage, starting a kindergarten, establishing social enterprises, teaching English, and assisting the churches. Home again for the birth of another son and the adoption of a Chinese daughter, Kevin and Julia felt their hearts being pulled back to the land they had come to love. They also began to hear the heart-cry of North Korea with its desperate needs.

God led them to the city of Dandong, poised on the border between China and its North Korean neighbour. Primed for tourism and development, it seemed the

perfect location for a new venture and before long the Garratts had opened *Peter's*, a western-style coffee shop. The novelty of the new gathering place attracted curious locals and many foreign visitors, and the mix of cultures, great food, and wonderful people made for an easy transition back to China. From their apartment balcony with its spectacular views, Kevin and Julia enjoyed magnificent sunsets and shared hospitality with family and friends. They had become part of the local landscape.

By the summer of 2014, positive meetings had paved the way for ongoing projects and unique opportunities for friendship in the DPRK. Julia trained volunteers and taught at the local university while Kevin worked on the logistics for badly needed construction projects and

child and the cultural practice of providing a feast for a favour was common. The lobby was empty when they arrived and took the elevator upstairs to a private dining room. As the meal progressed, the parents seemed ill at ease. Finally they cut the dinner short and sent Kevin and Julia downstairs alone. The elevator door opened to a lobby now filled with people and the Garratts assumed it must be a wedding celebration. To their horror, eighteen husky men rushed forward and grabbed them while video cameras rolled. When no one stepped in to help, they realized the dinner had been a set-up.

The terrified couple was separated and forced into two black sedans that drove by different routes to a Chinese jail where there was no phone call, no lawyer, and no explanation. Neither knew

**placed in separate isolation cells,
they struggled to comprehend the nightmare.**

emergency aid. They were excited about the season ahead and had no idea that their lives were about to change forever.

One August evening, the Garratts were invited to dinner at a quiet restaurant with a couple who wanted to talk about sending their daughter to university in Canada. Chinese parents were always eager to secure a successful future for their only

what had happened to the other. The entire plan had been orchestrated by the Chinese Ministry of State Security (MSS) and Kevin and Julia were immediately placed in separate isolation cells where the process of extracting confessions would begin. Astounded to learn that they were suspected of espionage, they struggled to comprehend the nightmare.

Hours turned into days and then months of endless waiting, locked in a room with two guards whose piercing eyes followed every movement. Privacy was a thing of the past. Meal trays came and left. The windows were barred and lights were on day and night. Daily six-hour interrogations taxed their minds, bodies and emotions, and interrogators seeking confessions repeatedly threatened execution. Kevin was regularly questioned while locked in a “tiger chair,” a painful restraining device.

But in the midst of the fear and confusion, God was there too, reminding his suffering children of his promises, giving them answers to impossible questions, and bringing strength through the words of Scripture and song.

After six months in isolation, Julia was allowed out on bail under closely-monitored restrictions and returned to their ransacked apartment. Kevin, however, was transferred to the 900-inmate Dandong Detention Centre where he was led to a cell already inhabited by twelve other inmates. Two rows of cots lined up side by side took most of the space, leaving only a narrow aisle in the centre to stand or pace. Fluorescent light tubes hung from the ceiling and cameras kept constant watch. Food was delivered through a hole in the door and for much of the time prisoners simply sat and did nothing. *This is hell*, thought Kevin.

Prison was both better and worse than isolation. No pressure of daily interrogations or grueling assignments that left the mind spinning, unable to rest. No sudden dread that latched on again and again during interrogation. In the cell, there was chatter and activity. Daily accomplishments were reduced to folding a blanket like the others or showering while the water was hot. In isolation there was only silence and a desperate wrestling to give order and meaning to a life without community. In prison, each man was one among many, juggling for a turn, but belonging to a group. In isolation, the psychological suffering was intense and unrelenting. The pressure to complete impossible memory tasks and the daily failure to produce satisfactory confessions created near-insanity. In prison, the deepest agony was sociological and physiological; men crammed together, suffering unending hopelessness, and experiencing the slow breakdown of their bodies though prolonged neglect.

Chronic pain and suffering were normal and continuous, and Kevin’s health was deteriorating month by month. The back of the cell had a solid door leading to an outdoor cage that faced a narrow dirt yard. It was made up of two cement walls and a concrete floor with bars on top and at the far end. When the guard found it

when despair overwhelmed them and tears flowed for hours, God came and made his presence real.

convenient, he would open the cage door and send everyone out for exercise. Those able to walk shuffled outside to pace in circles on the cement pad.

At first Kevin had liked the cage with its rush of fresh air. Now he had to force himself to go out, hands hanging limp as his body struggled to push through the required thirty minutes. On Day 365, the one-year anniversary of their abduction, he could bear it no longer. Dragging his aching body to the far end of the cage, Kevin held onto the bars, and wept.

Suddenly he noticed a dandelion poking its way bravely through the hard brown dirt of the adjacent yard. *How amazing*, he thought, *to see yellow! Did God put that dandelion there just for me?* The cell mood had been somber recently and many of the men just sat in silence or cried with faces buried in their cot. The drug addicts exploded in rage, but most of the inmates hid their pain and feelings. In spite of the drab greyness all around, that simple dandelion renewed Kevin’s hope once again that God was somehow at work.

Julia struggled as well. Being out on bail with restrictions made living in China so different than before. Everything seemed surreal. She was free to walk around the room, get a hairbrush or pour a drink of water without permission, but didn’t feel normal doing it. Her compressed nerves had packed together in survival mode and wouldn’t let go. The worst moment each week was the dreaded phone call for a reporting session. The ring immediately sent her mind back to the months in isolation and left her body shaking and heart pounding in panic. Never knowing what her interrogators would do or say made Julia ever fearful of doing something wrong and perhaps making her husband’s situation worse.

As the case dragged on and on, God gently shepherded his children through deep psychological and physical pain. While the disappointments were frequent and crushing, Kevin and Julia were discovering that it was still possible to hold on to hope, serve others, and experience the literal embrace of a love that kept shining

through. When despair overwhelmed them and tears flowed for hours, God came and made his presence real in a way they had never experienced before.

After 775 days in detention, Kevin Garratt was declared guilty of spying and sentenced to eight years in prison, to be followed by deportation. Unbelievably, just days later on September 15, 2016, in a Vancouver airport waiting room, a gaunt and bearded man stepped into the open arms of his wife and children.

Throughout the couple’s long suffering, hidden away in the darkness, God had showed up in unique and intimate ways. Answers to persevering prayer from around the world had given moment-by-moment hope, courage, and strength to endure. The Father’s purposes took time to unfold, but he had revealed himself to his servants in captivity and made known through them his deep love for the lost. They had indeed gone through the fire, but they had never been alone. ❏



Full circle

Driving down a hauntingly familiar road into the badlands of Alberta, I wondered for the hundredth time just exactly what I had gotten myself into. It had been less than ten years since I was in Drumheller and I certainly hadn't been hunting fossils. In 2009-2010 a judge had sentenced me to seven years in prison for a crime that, but for the grace of God, should have seen me put away for 25-to-life. But I knew that the militant atheist who first entered that prison was not the same man who approached the forbidding concrete walls and chain link fences on this day.

At that moment the memories and anxiety those walls once inspired in me began to make my bones want to shake out of their skin. Despite the fact that I was walking amid trusted friends and professors from Prairie, the all-too-familiar breezeway—a short, wide concrete hall punctuated by stone pillars that allowed air and hope to pass through—made me want to throw up and cry. Within a few minutes we were entering a newly constructed building I had never been in and we sat there waiting for what would come next. Then the students came in—prisoners who were now as I had been—and I remembered. I remembered who I was. I remembered *Whose* I was. And I remembered why I was there.

What would possess an ex-convict to go back and serve in the place where he was incarcerated?

Doing my internship with Prairie's Prison Bible Encounter Program has been harder on me than people may have realized. What would possess an ex-convict to willingly go back and serve in the place where he was incarcerated? You see, Jesus isn't a concept to me and

his commands are not mere suggestions. He isn't just a historical person who lived, died, and rose again. No. Jesus showed up for me when I needed him within those prison walls, and he is going to keep showing up for those now inside.

As much as he personally reveals himself in his Word, he also shows up through the faithful and obedient children of his Father, those who have the faith to come into the darkest hole and sit side by side with the most broken and corrupt of people. That's what gave Christ even a shred of credibility to me. It was his love shining through godly men that gave me the will to pick up the Bible that I used to revile and hear God's Word for myself. As I asked questions, sometimes

heated and derisive, the patience and love of God's children began to penetrate my heart of stone, until finally scales fell from my eyes and I could see the Lord with an unveiled face.

Because Jesus showed up for me, how could I do any less than show up when



the call came? I was a new student at the College when I learned that Prairie had been successful in their first Bible class at Bowden Institution and was thinking of starting another at Drumheller. When I was asked to become a tutor and volunteer, I knew it was impossible, that the Institution would never consider me. But we applied anyway and, beyond all credibility, I was approved.

Nearly a year later, I cannot help but be overwhelmed to tears at the conversations we've had with the students, the challenges we've all faced, and the prayers we've had answered. I am awed and humbled at what God is continuing to do through our team. We have wrestled with the oppressive reality of prison, the spiritual forces of darkness that are loathe to see the light shine, and those who would rather view the incarcerated as less than human. But none of it could detract from the glory that God has shown as we aim "to know Christ and make him known" behind prison bars.

By God's grace, I am a prisoner who has come full circle, a beloved child of God who now serves and welcomes others to follow Jesus and be loved by him. It is always the right time to show up and allow God to use you. Won't you join us? ❏

MAKING A DIFFERENCE CHANGING LIVES

In September of 2016, Prairie College introduced the *Prison Bible Encounter Program*, a college-level course of study that is changing lives inside the walls of Canadian Federal Correctional Institutions.

"I sensed the call of God on my life at 16, but took a wrong turn that landed me in and out of prison for the past twenty years. It's been a life-long dream to go to Bible College and I praise God for Prairie and all the staff who are making my dream come true." –Inmate student

Prisoners are often overwhelmed when they realize that Prairie has donors who give to a scholarship fund for qualified inmates to study in the *Prison Bible Encounter Program*. After all their bad choices, they find it hard to believe that someone would be willing to show them the grace of a second chance at learning.



YOU CAN HAVE A PART!

Your one-time or ongoing, monthly donation can make it possible for Prairie faculty and volunteers to bring the truth of God's Word into Canada's prisons.

SCHOLARSHIP
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FOR ONE STUDENT:

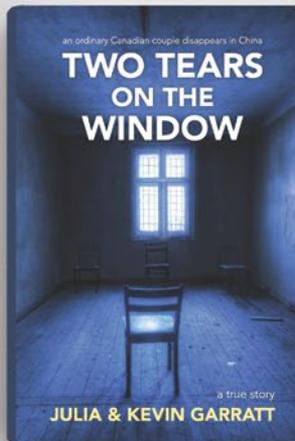
\$1,500
or **\$125/MONTH**

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(10 COURSES)
FOR ONE STUDENT:

\$15,000

PLEASE SEE PAGE 8 TO DONATE.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR SUPPORT OF THIS MINISTRY AND ARE PLEASED TO OFFER YOU **ONE** COPY* OF THE FOLLOWING...



TWO TEARS ON THE WINDOW

By Kevin and Julia Garratt

Canadians Kevin and Julia Garratt worked passionately in China for thirty years, assisting with education, humanitarian work, and Christian social enterprises. From 2008 to 2014 they ran a popular coffee house on the China/North Korea border and facilitated aid to North Korea. *Then they disappeared.* After dinner at a local restaurant, the couple was abducted, imprisoned and charged with espionage, pawns in an international conflict not of their making. Surviving took every breath, only made possible by courage and kindness, friendship and faith, and God's continual assurance of his presence. Facing a devastating outcome, a sudden twist propels the story toward a miraculous reunion...if they can survive the wait.

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Two Tears On the Window

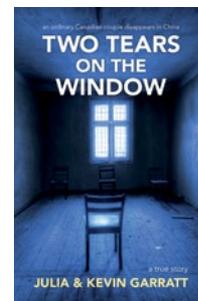
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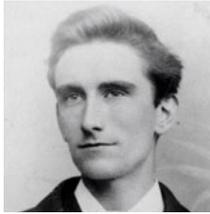
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NEWS & VIEWS

QUOTEWORTHY



OSWALD CHAMBERS

"When a man is in despair...thinking will never get him out. It must be by the sheer creative effort of God; therefore, when a man gets to despair he is in the right attitude to receive from God that which he cannot gain for himself."

ELISABETH ELLIOT

"Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one's thoughts. It is easier to talk oneself into a decision that has no permanence...than to wait patiently."



JONI EARECKSON TADA

"Faith isn't the ability to believe long and far into the misty future. It's simply taking God at his Word and taking the next step."

FRANCIS CHAN

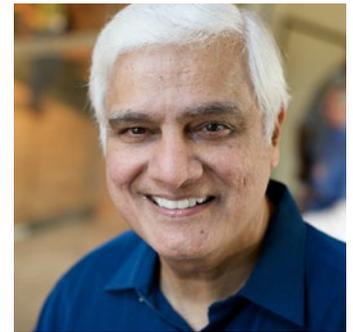
"Our greatest fear should not be of failure but of succeeding at things in life that don't really matter."



MEDITATION

All religions are not the same. All religions do not point to God. All religions do not say that all religions are the same. At the heart of every religion is an uncompromising commitment to a particular way of defining who God is or is not and accordingly, of defining life's purpose. Anyone who claims that all religions are the same betrays not only an ignorance of all religions, but also a caricatured view of even the best-known ones. Every religion at its core is exclusive.

“ RAVI ZACHARIAS ”



In Switzerland it's illegal to own only one guinea pig.

Techly



The medical term for ice cream headaches is sphenopalatine ganglioneuralgia.

HealthLine



NOW YOU KNOW



Goats have rectangular pupils.

Washington Post

The strongest wind ever recorded in a tornado was 318 miles per hour.

The Weather Channel



Bones found at Seymour Island in the Antarctic Peninsula are from penguins measuring 6 feet tall and weighing 250 pounds.

The Guardian

A group of pugs is called a grumble.

Pugs Home

GLIMPSES OF Kevin and Julia Garratt HOPE



Kevin and Julia Garratt had spent thirty years in China as entrepreneurs, raising their family and promoting aid and education. Then, without warning, on August 4th of 2014, State Security agents arrested them and charged them with espionage. The unsuspecting couple had become pawns in an international dispute with China, accused of collecting and stealing state secrets and passing them on to foreign agents. After six months in complete isolation, Julia was placed under house arrest. Kevin, however, went from isolation to prison, where he would languish for another year and a half. Their new book, Two Tears On the Window, recounts the dramatic details of captivity in their adopted homeland.

SERVANT: DID YOU SEE THIS COMING?

KEVIN AND JULIA: No. It was out of the blue. We were sure it was a mistake. After being made so welcome and working openly in China for years, it seemed impossible that our presence was a concern now. We had no way of knowing that something was going on politically between Canada and China.

YOU FIND OUT HOW BEAUTIFUL JESUS IS WHEN YOU REALLY NEED HIM.

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST EMOTIONS

Shock. Disbelief. Panic. Fear. Neither of us had any idea where the other had been taken and wondered for the first time if this was to be our last night alive. Strangely,

at the same time we also felt the calming peace of the Holy Spirit. You find out how beautiful Jesus is when you really need him.

YOU WERE HELD SEPARATELY. WAS THERE ANY WAY TO COMMUNICATE?

We had no contact, but during separate fifteen-minute daily outdoor walks, we left messages in the snow, creating snow sculptures and writing Bible verses. After three months, the interrogators let us be in the same room for the first time. We faced each other across a table for twenty minutes, but couldn't discuss the case at all. It was such a relief just to know that the other one was alive, and so comforting to know we shared a common story.

ISOLATION MUST HAVE BEEN A VERY DIFFICULT EXPERIENCE.

It was. Our every move was watched by guards who stayed in our rooms around the clock and we had to ask for even the most basic necessities. There was no

privacy and the light was always on, day or night. Interrogations lasted for hours and we were forced to write hundreds of pages of "confessions" about everything we'd done in China over thirty years. Night after night we were given "homework," answering more questions, re-writing endless, pointless details. The answers we gave were always twisted toward guilt and the "confessions" filled binders. Language misunderstandings made it easier to craft a criminal story. We had heard of coerced testimonies but never imagined that their pathways could be so deep and confusing.

WHAT KEPT YOU GOING?

A praying community and the persevering actions of friends and family who raised our case with the Canadian government at every opportunity. We were able to have our Bibles with us from day one and that gave us a lifeline of encouragement and strength. We also had our personal relationship and history with a God who

had never failed us. We learned that he offers special gifts to us in waiting and suffering seasons and his promises gave us strength. In isolation you have only yourself and God to talk to. When our own voices brought fear, God answered with his peace. He stood near, and when despair and exhaustion were too much for us, his love restored us.

WAS THERE ONE CHALLENGE THAT STOOD OUT?

Time was both a friend who kept us hoping and an enemy prolonging our suffering. Our hope in coming to China had always been that people would see the way we lived our lives and come to us with questions. Now, confined in an information vacuum, could we still carry out our mission to give an answer to everyone for the hope that was in us? Could we give voice to the way isolation, captivity and injustice reveal the capacity and resilience of the human soul and spirit to cling to joy, embrace kindness, and show that love never fails? We found that no matter what is taken from you, you can still serve others, and God gave us those opportunities to love our captors.

COULD ISOLATION, CAPTIVITY AND INJUSTICE REVEAL THE CAPACITY OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT TO CLING TO JOY AND SHOW THAT LOVE NEVER FAILS?

KEVIN, HOW DID YOU COPE WHEN YOU WERE TRANSFERRED TO PRISON?

The emotional pain was constant and so was the physical pain as my health deteriorated drastically. I really thought I might die there. The darkest moments came when I focused on the situation. But as many different inmates passed through my cell, God allowed me to share my hope over and over. He seemed to be saying, "Depend on me, trust me. I know what I'm doing." And just when I'd think things were hopeless, I would see him at work again.

CAN YOU DESCRIBE YOUR TRIAL?

I was not allowed to speak or consult my lawyer and the trial went ahead as if I wasn't even there. Witnesses were not permitted and nothing that Julia or I had written during six months of interrogation was admissible. The lack of evidence that should have proved our innocence appeared to be irrelevant. A day later I was shocked to hear that Julia had been given permission for a family visit to Canada and that she would be brought back for the verdict.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN JULIA WENT HOME WITHOUT YOU?

I had imagined doing all the first things together, like hugging the kids. But nothing happened the way I hoped. The impact really hit me when I realized that I would be left alone in China and we had no idea if Julia would be allowed to return. She was essentially still a "prisoner" even in Canada, watched constantly and followed everywhere. Even her family's phones and computers were compromised. Only immediate relatives and a few trusted friends knew she was there and she had to keep silent about her ordeal in order to protect me back in China.

HOW DID YOU FEEL WHEN YOU WERE FINALLY SENTENCED?

It happened very abruptly. Julia was in Canada and had no warning either, so she couldn't even be with me in the courtroom. I was stunned by the length of the sentence and couldn't comprehend how this had happened. How does a man who loves China like his own family get sentenced to eight years in prison as a spy? But to our amazement and utter joy, deportation followed almost immediately. I couldn't believe it was actually happening until I was on a plane outside of Chinese airspace. There were no words to describe the reunion with my family.

YOU'VE WRITTEN TOGETHER ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE. WHAT WAS YOUR PURPOSE IN TELLING THE STORY?

It's really a 'survival' story about how you cope with suffering and how you maintain your relationship as a couple when you're isolated. We want it to be a testament of faith in the midst of dark circumstances. God gives you the resources you will need for your very own story. And we know that when God wrote our story long



Kevin and Julia Garratt. "We've learned to treasure the simplest things."

before we were born, he saw this season, gave us enough grace for that experience, and meant it for good.

HAS THIS EXPERIENCE CHANGED YOU?

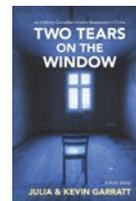
We have more love and compassion for people suffering injustice and wake up every morning thankful for life, for friends, for family, and for freedom. We've learned to treasure the simplest things and don't ever want to take them for granted again.

WOULD YOU EVER RETURN TO CHINA?

We'd love to see the day come when there will be an invitation to return and we can put the past to rest in a new and wonderful embrace of friendship. In the meantime, we still feel that God has a role for us and we now divide our time between North America and needy areas in Southeast Asia.

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO SAY TO OUR READERS?

We have no desire to repeat those days. But to suffer unjustly and experience God the way many of our brothers and sisters around the world experience him every day is a privilege. The partnership of human resilience, prayer, and God's personal involvement in our stories is a mystery and a miracle! We know for certain that in every situation God is always at work, always present and always has a bigger plan than we can see. ❧



To order your copy of *Two Tears On the Window*, please see Page 8.



CALLED TO SERVE

LIEUTENANT (N) HAUPI TOMBING, CHAPLAIN

Glittering stars shone in a velvet blue sky and the silver moon seemed near enough to touch as I gazed out from the bridge wing of HMCS Charlottetown, a Canadian patrol frigate steaming eastward across the Atlantic. Earlier, a golden sunset had set the ocean aflame as flying fish skipped over the waves and I never tired of these marvels of God’s creation. As I recalled the gentle valleys and blue-green hills of my childhood home in Manipur State, India, it struck me again how unlikely it was that I should have ended up on a ship, riding the rolling currents of a vast ocean.

My road to becoming a military chaplain was a long and unexpected one. After the frightening experience of being caught between the advancing British army and the retreating Japanese army at the end of World War II, my father swore that none of his sons would ever join the military as long as he was alive. That was an iron-clad decision, so the thought never even occurred to me.

MY FATHER SWORE THAT NONE OF HIS SONS WOULD EVER JOIN THE MILITARY.

In a town that was predominantly Hindu and animist, our family was unique. My grandfather was an early believer and pastor who passed his Christian faith down to later generations. To me, however, it had been a second-hand faith at best—until a terrible car accident in my teens almost cost me my life. I knew I had been given a second chance and decided to make a serious commitment to God.

Pursuing Theology and Divinity degrees seemed the next logical step, but even after all that I couldn’t ignore the underlying passion for music that had

been there all my life. The unexpected gift of a generous scholarship made it possible for me to come to Prairie Bible College in Canada where I earned a Bachelor of Music degree in 1993. Later, at Prairie Graduate School, studies continued and I also met the love of my life, Grace Huang. In 1996 I accepted a position as an associate pastor at Trinity Baptist Church in Vancouver, BC, and the following year Grace and I were married.

After I had been pastoring for several years, a friend asked if I would consider joining the military chaplaincy. I told him we weren’t interested in uprooting the family and moving around every three or four years. In 2004 I met up with him again and we had pretty much the same conversation. Two years later, a military couple in my congregation asked if I had ever thought of becoming a “Padre” in the Canadian Armed Forces. I told them I was happy where I was. When the issue re-surfaced *again* in 2010, I went home and told my wife about it.

“Maybe,” said Grace thoughtfully, “the Lord is trying to get your attention and if so, I would hate to stand in the way.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing, but she was serious, so I went ahead and applied. If it was of God, it would happen. If not, I could say that I tried, but it wasn’t meant to be. To my surprise, in March of 2013, I found myself being sworn in as a Reserve Chaplain for the 15th Field Artillery in Vancouver. That opportunity provided me with a feel for the job while still continuing to serve my church and not having to move the family. After completing my Doctor of Ministry at Carey Theological College, I spent the following summer on a busy army training base in Wainwright, AB. Apparently God’s plan was all or nothing, because an offer soon came for a full-time chaplaincy. In January of 2015, I arrived at my new posting in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the middle of a huge snowstorm. My wife and two children joined me that summer.

Upon graduation from the Basic Military Officers Qualification, chaplains enter the service at the rank of Army Captain. But when I transferred into Regular Force (full-time) and was posted to a naval base, I switched my uniform and became a Lieutenant (Navy). The motto of the Royal Canadian Chaplain Service is “*Called to Serve*” and our role is to provide spiritual, religious and moral support to all military members and their families regardless of faith tradition or background. This is accomplished through the ministry of presence as we put on our boots and serve alongside the members in a multitude of environments.

The possibility of deployment is one of the many challenges that military



families face. In order to prepare, the ship has tests and exercises to complete. Every sailor on board, including the chaplain, is required to have current fitness and medical, first aid, firefighter, and flood control training. When all is said and done, the entire mission can take up to a year.

It is never easy when the day of departure comes. Excited but anxious, families and friends crowd the dockyard for final hugs and tears. As the ship blows its horn and slowly slips from the jetty sailors wave goodbye, the band plays the Naval Hymn, “*Eternal Father, Strong to Save*,” and soon the vessel is lost to the horizon.

As the chaplain on board, I circulate through the ship, chat with the members, help serve meals in the galley, and provide counselling to any who request it. I’ll attend meetings, serve on the port visit planning team, conduct Sunday services, work closely with “the Doc” (Physician



Assistant), and keep the Captain apprised of the morale and ethical well-being of the ship. Work routines are usually straightforward, but as a chaplain charged with spiritual and emotional care, I’ve learned to “expect the unexpected” as well.

The ship is like a floating village that never sleeps, with over two hundred sailors crammed into close quarters. We get to know the good, the bad and the ugly side of people, but mostly the wonderful and resilient spirit of our men and women in uniform, united in their mission. Their stories, passions, sacrifices and experiences cannot be fully articulated to the civilian world and they deserve our best support.

Deployments have certainly given me some memorable experiences. In 2015 I sailed with *HMCS Montreal* to the coast of Ireland and Scotland. It was a highlight for our crew when the Prince of Wales came aboard to visit the ship. I also had the opportunity to lead in the Remembrance Day ceremony over the Atlantic Ocean where many Canadian sailors sacrificed their lives.

Then in 2016, I accompanied the *HMCS Charlottetown* on a six-month deployment to the Mediterranean as part of the standing NATO Maritime Group. From June 2016 to January 2017 we worked with thirteen other navies and visited eleven ports in seven countries including Spain, Portugal, Greece, France, Norway, Romania and Egypt. Along with our regular duties, we organized humanitarian activities whenever possible. Over the Christmas season I made arrangements for the crew to lend a helping hand to an orphanage on the island of Crete. Our sailors enthusiastically joined in with painting, landscaping, cleaning the grounds, and gardening, leaving the yard and playground a much more inviting place. After the work was done, we joined the children for Christmas carols and gifts and left with a real sense of satisfaction, knowing that our service would have a lasting impact on their lives.

At CFB Halifax there are several fleet chaplains who take turns accompanying the ships, while the base chaplains look after those ashore. Many sailors have spent thousands of days at sea, which can be challenging for families, especially when communication is minimal at best. It is like trying to live a normal life in an abnormal environment, and the Padre is not immune to the challenges of this lifestyle. A chaplain goes through the difficulties and emotional

WE WERE AT SEA AND THERE WAS NOTHING I COULD DO. IT WAS ONE OF MY LONELIEST MOMENTS.

cycles of deployment like everybody else.

On the evening of September 9, 2016, I received word that my mother had suddenly passed away. We were at sea and there was nothing I could do, nowhere

to run and hide or express my grief. I was the one supposed to comfort others, but now I was in need of comforting. It was one of the loneliest moments on my deployment.

It would be another forty-eight hours before we arrived at the next port where I was able to fly out to India. Grace flew from Halifax to join me, but we missed the funeral. Later that week, after a family dinner I received an email; I was being recalled to duty immediately, to meet the ship in Norway instead of the previously planned port in Ireland. We packed up that night, rebooked our travel arrangements, and left the next morning in a hurry. It was painful to leave my wife standing alone in the early hours at Glasgow airport as I flew in the opposite direction to meet my ship.

Just two months later, while still grieving the loss of my mother, I received a call in the night from Grace. She was facing the possibility of breast cancer and would be having her first surgery without me by her side. Far across the ocean, all I could do was pray for my loved one. Further surgeries and testing would confirm malignancy, which is now, thankfully, in the second year of remission.

Despite the challenges, the rewards of serving our fine men and women in uniform have been immeasurable. It is truly an adventure to travel to so many places around the world and to serve and grow with such a diverse group of wonderful people.

Many years ago, I answered “Yes” to God’s call to serve, and these are simply the seasons and details of a journey that he is working out in my life. I am indebted to my family and colleagues for their unwavering support, and every new day reminds me to be grateful for God’s faithfulness in all things. ❧

For information on serving with the Royal Canadian Chaplaincy Service, contact Padre Tombing at haupi.tombing@forces.gc.ca

The paradox of hope

In Romans 8:10 and 11, the apostle Paul lays out the paradoxical tension of the believer's life: *"If Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he...will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you"*.

We are subject to sin and death, and yet we are alive by the divine power of the Spirit's presence in us. My first taste of living in a "body subject to death" came early. When I learned at the age of seven that my mother and father had decided to separate, my world came apart. The most agonizing reality was that now I had to choose how to divide my time between my parents. I vividly remember my instinctive reaction as a boy: nothing could put our family back together, so the best option was to distance myself from the part of me that hurt. I would become like

The aftermath of these two events is a testimony to God's abundant grace. After a year of continuous treatment and another three months of radiation, the tumor was completely destroyed. My mother and father, too, never allowed their own issues to get in the way of being generous, caring parents to me, and I gained a loving stepmother and stepfather along with five new siblings through their subsequent remarriages.

Nevertheless, these two experiences continued to shape the course of my life. I will always have an increased risk of

I would become an unbreakable stone, invincible no matter where it was thrown.

an unbreakable stone, invincible no matter where it was thrown.

Then, while playing Little League baseball in fifth grade, I began to experience random bouts of excruciating lower back pain. Doctors eventually found a malignant, baseball-sized tumor and three weeks later I went in for surgery. They discovered, however, that in that short time the tumor had grown voraciously and removal was no longer an option. Over the next year I spent several days every other week in hospital, receiving chemotherapy by IV and battling the difficult side effects.

cancer recurrence, and after I married my wife Andrea, whose passion and call is to be a mother, we learned that we would never have biological children because of the chemotherapy treatments. Infertility remains an ongoing reality, but God's gift of three beautiful daughters is a living evidence of his loving provision.

My tendency to distance myself internally from pain, however, became an ongoing pattern in my life. I was adept at managing external appearances, but couldn't seem to make my internal life fall in line. The faith of my childhood



Justin and Andrea are thankful for God's beautiful gifts: Dorothy (3) and twins Ruth and Susannah (6 mos).

and teenage years was often defined by meeting expectations outwardly while struggling internally to have genuine love for others or to confront private sin.

During a crisis of faith and identity in my freshman year as an undergraduate student, I came across some *Berenstain Bear* books that my parents had often read to me. Suddenly my heart filled with the same longing and grief I had carried since childhood. My first reaction was to dismiss those feelings, but the second was to realize that part of me was still the same little boy from years ago. At that moment God made his presence felt, reminding me that I am his beloved son and calling me to let his love address my hurt. In the midst of my own confusion about who I was and which life I should live, God came searching in my dark heart to find me and set me free.

I have experienced the Lord creating life within me out of emotional, physical and spiritual death. And yet I know he is not finished. Our hope does not reside in a perfect resolution of suffering and sin here and now, but rather in the presence of the Risen One who dwells with us throughout the journey, and in his final defeat of sin and death when he returns to bring resurrection life. ❏

Dr. Justin Allison is Associate Professor of New Testament at Prairie College.

Coming home

THIS PAST WEEK I'VE BEEN FLYING AROUND THE COUNTRY.

I've slept in four hotels, visited five towns, hopped on six flights. I gave seven speeches, ordered ten restaurant meals, and ate thirteen little bags of pretzels. It's rare that I leave home without my wife, but this week I did. I sometimes tell people that when I travel without her, I shave one leg. That way, when I climb into bed at night, it feels like she's right there beside me.

But it's not true. When I climb into bed at night, I'm fully aware that she's not with me. I'm fully aware that I'm far from home.

There's a file of songs on my phone titled "Home." Without thinking, I find myself singing duets with people like John Denver: "Take me home, country roads, to the place I belong..." Or Ian Thomas: "I'm comin' home. I've been away too long." Or Gerry Rafferty: "This silver bird takes me 'cross the sky; Just one more hour and I'll be home and dry..."

Home.

When the final flight hits the tarmac, I have it down to a science. I'm a carry-on-luggage-only kind of guy. I sit as close to first class as I can. Squeeze past stragglers on the gangway. Stride down the escalator two steps at a time. Sprint to my car, hopping for green lights. I'll admit I speed just a little, scanning the horizon for the lights of home. The gal who loves me is there. My own bed. My own fridge. Ah, home.

We all long for home. Check the country charts if you doubt me. Hundreds of hit songs have been written about it. "The Green, Green Grass of Home." "My Old Kentucky Home." I count twenty-one songs all titled simply "Home."

One of my favorite songs of home is from Carry Underwood. She tells of a six-year-old orphan boy who's been shuffled from house to house, from school to



school. New moms. New dads. New houses that will never be home. When people ask him how he likes his new place, he smiles and says, "This is my temporary home."

She sings of a young single mom with nowhere to go. She's searching for work, looking for love, longing for hope. Every night in the homeless shelter she whispers to her baby girl, "This is our temporary home."

She sings of an old man in a hospital bed surrounded by people he loves. "Don't cry for me," he tells them. "I'll see you all someday." The years have informed him that even the most opulent of earthly homes is a temporary stopover on the journey to his final destination. I've sat by that hospital bed.

You don't meet older folk who say, "It's just gone so slow."

Said goodbye to parents who were passing through. What promised to be enduring was so brief. You don't meet older folk who say, "It's just gone so *slow*." The day my dad died someone said, "I'm sorry you lost him." But I hadn't. I knew where he was.

The Book of Revelation shocks with graphic battles and fiery pits and dragons. And in the midst of it we encounter earth-shattering hope. John writes,

"Look, God's home is now among his people. He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain" (Rev. 21:3,4 NLT).

No more death or pain? That's right. No more soup kitchens, orphanages, or funeral homes. No Band-Aids, First Aid, or hearing aids. No police stations or divorce courts. No anxiety or depression. No worry or fear. What would you give in exchange for a home like that?

A little girl lived close to a graveyard. A friend asked, "Aren't you afraid to go through the cemetery?" She laughed and replied, "No. My home is on the other side."

Heaven awaits those who have trusted Jesus as Savior. We make a difference in this world while longing for the next. Each meal, each pretzel, each flight, takes us one step closer to Home. **IS**

Phil Callaway's temporary home is in Three Hills, Alberta. He has three grown children and eight not-so-grown grandchildren. Visit him at philcallaway.com



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