

# The Reunion

(from the eyes of a wife)

by: Vickie C. Crow

Here goes. I am not a writer, but the love of my life asked me to write down things as I saw them. For years there has been an unspoken loss in Dale's life: the love of his father. Over fifteen years ago, due to some unfortunate circumstances Dale's father, Cleve, walked out of our lives and I stood by quietly and let him go.

We went to stay with Cleve and his new wife, Dottie one weekend. Cleve called me back to his bedroom supposedly to bring his morning coffee. It was more than that. It was so he could take one last stab at Dale through me. His exact words were, "why do you stay with him...they can train monkeys to do his job." I was so hurt that I encouraged Dale to stay away.

Last weekend when Dale's brother contacted him about his dad, I must admit I was scared. I was scared of what would happen if Dale went, but I was even more scared of what would happen if he didn't go. Thank God it wasn't up to me. I probably would have stopped in Mobile and came home and repeated these actions several times. God was leading Dale as He had been for years. Dale has never been a bitter man and often encouraged me to not be bitter.

From the time Dale left I had been praying for God to protect Dale from the evil man aka his dad. I called Dianne, Dale's sister-in-law and told her that Dale was on his way to see his dad so she better start praying. She and Kenny, Dale's brother, were at dinner with some friends and they were getting ready to go see "The Passion of Christ". She was in such shock when I told her Dale was on the way that she immediately gave her phone to Kenny and began to weep and pray. That is the state I was in as well almost the entire time Dale was gone. When Kenny got on the phone he said he told Dale if your father just wanted to tell you to go to hell that you owed that to him. My heart fell to my stomach because I thought he knew that was what he wanted to tell Dale. I couldn't protect Dale from that or so I thought.

The next 10 hours would seem like days and weeks not hours. Kenny buzzed me every 15 minutes until their movie started and then picked up when it ended. I repeatedly told him Dale would call me when he had a chance. I broke down and called Dale just to make sure he was ok. Dale answered and said he was with his dad and everything was fine, I was angry. I couldn't understand how Dale could have such peace. Then Dale let his father speak on the Nextel radio, I wanted to crawl under my covers and hide. I still didn't want to let go. He had hurt Dale for so long and I was mad.

After Dale called I called Kenny and told him I had finally heard from Dale. There was a long pause on the radio. Finally he came back clearing his voice and asked "Well, how did it go?" I told him according to Dale it had gone fine. I told him how Dale had prayed with him about his sins and he began to weep. Dianne got on the radio and said Kenny had been trying to get Cleve to pray with him for months. They couldn't wait to talk to Dale and get information first hand.

Sunday in church, I noticed Dale was not as loud singing as he usually is. When we sang "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" I noticed Dale began to cry on the part that says "Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer." By the end of the song I was crying with my husband. When the choir was finished with their song, I came and sat what seemed to be a canyon away from him. I knew he was hurting, and I couldn't help. I reached around our daughter to let him know I was there, but I could only reach him with the very tip of my fingernail. After the last hymn, a friend stopped me at the piano and said that she had a tough time

singing the anthem because she was watching my husband cry. I had shared with her before church what my husband had just been through.

That Sunday afternoon Dale said that he wanted to take our girls up to see his father. He had never seen them as we adopted the girls 10 years ago. I talked to both of the girls and told them if they would go and support their father in this. I began to pray for Dale's strength to drive that miserable drive again and for God to protect our girls. I wasn't sure how the girls were going to deal with things or where Dale were going to get the strength to deal with them on top of everything. I tried to call get off work and go with them but had a hard time getting any one to let me off. I finally got to some one that gave me to go ahead to go with my husband and help him in this time of need. Dale had gone out and when he got home I told him I was going too. He stopped dead in your tracks and came and gave me a big hug. I knew then that I had made the right decision to go.

The ride was long and silent except for the banter of directions between us. When we made it to Arkansas and the roads changed all of a sudden God began to lead us by the cross. The first thing I noticed was an old broken fence with the three red crosses painted on it, then the next curve had a hill with the single cross on it. At first I didn't think Dale noticed, but he proved me wrong on the way back. Dale began calling the crosses before we got to them. Just as we made it to the nursing home the last set of crosses were three crosses with a white cloth on one of them. Even though I felt I had gone up there to give him a piece of my mind I had peace of mind. God had used that ten hour ride to calm me down.

When we went in and Cleve was sleeping, I stepped back in awe of the frail body that lay before us. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to do. I walked up behind Dale and said "hey Dad. Do you know who this is?" He replied with a tear filled voice "Vickie, lost time. I am so sorry for the lost time." At that point, all I could do is tell him I loved him and guess who came to see you.

He cried for 10 minutes and repeated "lost time. I'm sorry for lost time." I introduced Dale's father to our children, not as a new parent would introduce an infant to a grandparent, but teenagers to their dying grandfather. Again, the anger swelled up in me. I wanted so desperately to feel the emotions that had become familiar for the last fifteen years, but I kept hearing Jesus say "forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors." This had been our pastor's sermon for three weeks now.

When I sat before this dying man's bed I couldn't be angry. I kept hearing a friend speak about thief on the cross and then the scene from "The Passion" would flash in my head. All of the bitterness and hate I had felt for years was replaced by love and compassion. When Dale was on one side of Cleve and I was on the other I was overwhelmed with a sense of loss. Cleve had referred to how proud he was of our marriage and he recalled memories of our wedding day. I couldn't understand how Dale could be so strong.

I didn't want the night to end. Dale noticed that I was getting too hot and sent us outside. I knew the girls were getting tired and thirsty, so we went to the car to get some cash. In a last ditch effort to ruin the night Satan stepped in and gave Brittany the keys to the car. Being true to form, she proceeded to lock them in the car. My purse was in there, Dale's keys and my spare key. There we were trying desperately to open anything: a door a window just something. When we went back inside I made Brittany tell Dale in an effort for him to be less mad. But he was not mad at all. He simply called and got the 800 number for our Chrysler road side assistance and they were there in 15 minutes and took less than 5 minutes to open the door and didn't charge a penny.

Dale's father's observation at that point was "Dale you are a big man, with big hands and a loving personality. I am proud of you. I don't know if I would be as gracious if I were in your shoes." Cleve was asking for pain medication and I proceeded to march right down to the nurse's station as if I were in charge and insisted that they get him his pill. Once this was done Dale took the girls and I to Cleve and

Dottie's house.

I was confused about a comment Dale's father made, "It got back to me that Cliff was a better father than I was, so I left you alone." Dale explained to me that his mother had used him to get back at his father and this was some of the reason of the friction between the two of them. It reminded me of the story in the Old Testament about the two women who went before the king arguing over a baby. The king ordered that the child be cut in half and the real mother insisted that the child be given to the other woman to save the baby. The king knew this was the real mother. Dale's father had backed out of his life to let him have a decent life.

We were up early the next morning to begin everything again. Dottie told Dale he was welcome to come with them to the doctor's office. I could see the pride on Dale's face when we got to Cleve's he told you he wanted you to meet Angel, the head nurse, and his doctor. Then Cleve looked at me and said "I forgot to tell Angel that you are a VICE PRESIDENT at a bank." I guess you told him that in your private visit the night before. I am not one to be stuck on titles, but I was very proud at that moment.

We spent the day full of waiting: we waited for Cleve's bath, his pain medicine, his lunch and then the doctor's appointment. Upon arrival back at the nursing home Dale wheeled his father back to his room with him telling everyone " I'll see you in heaven. I know that is where I am going now. I'll see you in heaven." We packed everything up and got ready to take him home.

When we got to the house Dale helped his father in the house. He just wanted to walk around one more time. Dale walked with him in case he fell again, but Dale looked like a little kid walking behind his dad. I was so proud of you. Cleve several times had referred to Dales hands being big and him being a big man, but look at that personality. He asked Dale to carry on the Crow legacy. We knew the time had come for us to leave, but no one wanted to. Finally, we said our good byes and left in silence.

As far back as I can remember Dale have wanted a relationship with his dad. I can't recall the number of devotions or references at camp alter calls Dale gave about you not having the love of his earthly father. What a gift Dale has been given: the love and acceptance of his father. Some one said it was the reverse of the Prodigal Son: it was the prodigal father. The only thing that can top this reunion is when we get to Heaven and Dale's earthly father is waiting with our Heavenly Father to welcome Dale home.