



# A Measure of Grace

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## UPDATE: Former WGA Staff Member *By Mary Heathman*

WGA group members and supporters often ask us how former staff member, Karen Wood is doing and if we have heard from her. We don't need the inquiries to remind us of her absence—it seems daily there are reminders of her investment in WGA and the lives of group members.

Sometimes during a discussion at a staff meeting, I become aware that I am listening for a perspective that hasn't yet been shared. Before long, as I consider what's missing, I realize that if Karen had been there, she would have been the most passionate of all of us about the issue at hand. I miss her heart.

Occasionally I hear Karen's words ring in my head, triggered by a situation she often spoke boldly about. For instance, when we are talking about replacing the upstairs carpet at the WGA offices. "It really is awful and should be replaced

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## Keys ~ physical, mental, emotional and spiritual *by Karen Wood*

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### An update

Greetings! Many of you probably know that, until Christmas of 2003, I was a WGA staff member. Since then, I have visited several Eastern Orthodox monasteries for women. I have decided on a community. It is in California. It is not a stone mansion located in a rural area, with many nuns soberly walking through dark corridors. Rather, it is two suburban houses located in a town near the ocean. The garage of one of the houses has been converted into a chapel where the sisters gather three to four times a day for prayer. The communal prayer times are not in the middle of the night. Rather, they gather for prayer in the morning at 7:30am, and the final prayer time in the evening is at 8pm. It is a small community, currently having about six women in it. The evening meal is usually eaten together, and sometimes other meals as well. Conversation around the table includes what could be labeled “edifying”, and also casual and humorous. The head of the monastery, or abbess, has been a nun for forty years, so has some experience under her belt. I look forward to her guidance as I enter this new life. As far as what the sisters “do”, the abbess said to me that the

point of monastic life is not focused on what you do, but on who you are (and, presumably, on who you are becoming.)

What the sisters do includes the routine, such as cooking, cleaning, and gardening. It also includes doing things that the individual sisters are inclined toward, like teaching children or helping the hungry. When I was visiting the monastery, I spent some of my time visiting a person who was going through detox for alcohol. I also spent some time with the abbess seeing where the Monarch butterflies spend the winter and walking on the beach. Like WGA, much of the support for this monastery comes from people who believe in it. Some money is raised through the sale of cards and books, but not enough to be self-supporting. The nun who teaches children is not paid for her services, but money comes into the monastery because people appreciate what she is doing.

Well, so much for the specifics of what I am signing up for. I’d also like to share some of the thoughts this process of exploring a new phase of my life has generated. So, here goes....

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## **Keys – a metaphor**

I have no keys. I don't remember the last time I had no keys – probably 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. By 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I had a key to a drawer I could lock at the boarding school I attended, and probably a key to a suitcase or trunk. But just last week, I signed over my car to my brother, Bill, losing the last four keys on my chain. The day before, I had returned my house keys to the family I had lived with for more than eight years.

When Bill was young, he made a wooden key for my mother with the inscription, "The key to God is prayer." As I was experiencing the strange sensation of being keyless, Bill's comment was, "You are divesting yourself of every key except the most fundamental." As I thought about what a key means – ownership, power, control – I saw keys as a good metaphor for the transition I am trying to make in my life. I do want to transition from self-reliance, self-sufficiency and self-will, to relying on God and embracing his will. I want to hand him the keys of my life, whatever that might look like in this new area of my growth.

## **Will – growth and direction**

But this leads me to a few more thoughts regarding this transition in my life. I just turned 55 a few days back. You could say, I spent the first half of my life (give or take!) learn-

ing to stand on my own two feet, learning to trust myself enough to act, and developing the will to take that action. Through this developmental process, I came into myself and my ability to act decisively. Now, I don't intend to deny my will, but only to take up arms against that self-will that cuts me off from the glory of God's will and my participation in it.

Haven't you noticed that it takes will power to deny yourself your selfish urges? I don't want to become God's "doormat", but rather to use the will I have developed to seek God and his kingdom, rather than my own. I want to use the will God has developed in me to align myself with the will of God. I want to engraft onto the Vine, not become something God wipes his feet on. (Who would want to surrender to a God who wants to wipe his feet on you, anyway!?) I want to fight like a warrior, to fight to break away from the gravity of my own confining will.

That sounds poetic and fun. What it will likely look like is going to prayer when I'd rather sleep. It could be cooking a meal that will taste good to others, instead of just emptying whatever is in the frig into a bowl and throwing it on the table. Or (yuck) receiving a criticism, taking it to my room, working through my negative reactions and looking for God's part in what was said. In all of these, my major job is not to give up my will

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# Reflections:

## Thoughts From a WGA Leader

By Nancy Hicks

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### Straight Paths

**P**roverbs 3:5-6 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.*

*Following are three stories about straight paths:*

Story #1: Three years ago, on his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, a huge maple tree fell over on my husband's car as he was driving down the street. The trunk of the tree hit the hood, bounced up to the roof—which caved in to within 8 inches of the head of our sleeping, nine month old son in the back seat—bounced again and sheared the trunk off of the car. The truck behind Brad was totaled as it ran into the tree as it landed on the road behind our car. No one was injured. We've often talked about the accident since: a split second earlier and Brad would have hit the tree trunk head on at 40 miles per hour; a split second later and the tree would have come through the front windshield.

Story #2: A few weeks ago, we had a mini-family vacation planned in Breckenridge for the weekend. After making the reservations, we discov-

ered that our daughter had a school presentation that Saturday morning. I stewed and chewed and rearranged and tried to make everything work. Our Saturday morning appointment in Breckenridge was unchangeable; the teachers at the school were adamant that Brittany couldn't miss the presentation. My perfect plan was crumbling and I was not happy about it. A teacher finally conceded that Brittany could come a few hours later. So, early Saturday afternoon, Brad and Britt headed down the mountain. They were delayed by a huge traffic jam caused by the girder that had fallen off of C-470 onto I-70 that morning and killed a young family. The girder fell at 10:30—exactly the time I would have put my family there if my plans had not fallen through.

*Believe it or not, I paid attention to this and began to fight to be aware of God's protection and plans being bigger than mine. I wanted to learn to give in more gracefully and with more faith when my really great plans were altered or interrupted. The next opportunity came quickly.*

Story #3: We were thrilled when Brad got free tickets to a pre-release showing of a movie. A free date! We

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looked forward to it all week. The theatre was across town during rush hour traffic; we left late; there was an accident . . . You get the picture. I was aware of the possibility of a greater plan this time. I tried to unclench my fingers and wait to see what it might be. We flew into the parking lot at 7:00, ran up to the ticket window in time to discover that the theatre was full and they had closed the doors for the movie. We decided to forge ahead to the ticket gate and ask there: Same story. The young man was really apologetic as he told us that there was no room. As he finished his sentence, someone said “Brad & Nancy?” A dear friend, that we hadn’t seen for years had been walking to the restroom in the split second that we were at the ticket gate. “There’s plenty of room in our

theatre,” she said. “Didn’t you know they opened a second viewing room?” She got us into the theatre, we sat with our old friends and went out for coffee afterwards. We got to hear about the miracle of their marriage being restored since we had last seen them, and their son’s life being miraculously protected from a mistaken medical diagnosis. We walked away reconnected and with faith encouraged.

*The God of the Universe has a better view of my life than I do. I’m trying to learn to let go when my plans are frustrated. I’m trying to learn to not to lean on my own understanding. How about you?*

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*(Keys... continued from page 3)*

power, but to use it for loving God more than my self understanding or self indulgence. In a workshop Mary Heathman presents, her handout refers to John’s comment that we love God because he first loved us. Mary follows that with “Believe it!” Well, we don’t completely, so she adds, “Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.” Well, we won’t want to use our will to love God if we don’t really believe he loves us. But if we do believe it, and to the extent that we do, we can begin to fight our self focus and to strive to love God back. That

requires the will to surrender to God’s will – to go to war against our own self-destroying urges.

### **Surrender - doormat or warrior?**

So, what is the difference between “doormat” surrender and “warrior” surrender? If I surrender in doormat fashion, I actually cling to my personal agenda, although in veiled ways, and attempt to make things happen my way and to my satisfac-

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*(Keys... continued from page 5)*

tion. “Doormating” is actually veiled self-will and is manipulative and self-pitying. A person feels angry and slimed when a doormat person has done her “doormat thing”. But the slimed upon person often comes out looking like a total bad guy, and the “poor doormat” as the one to be pitied and consoled.

On the other hand, warrior surrender, ironically, includes a despair in my ability to bring about God’s purposes. This is because of a recognition of God and others as independent agents that I cannot manipulate into doing my will. It includes exerting my will, but exerting it against my own excesses and self-destructive tendencies. Warrior surrender feels clean. The sweat of wrestling against what I know is standing in the way of a fuller life in God stands in healthy tension with my awareness that I can’t do it myself. But it is not a limp rag feeling, even when I feel powerless. Rather, this place of powerlessness includes the sense of coming to the end of my forced agenda and it includes hope – that place where God’s strength does kick in when my weakness is acknowledged.

I think doormat surrender and what I am calling warrior surrender are diametrically opposed. I hope, in this next leg of my journey, as I join a monastic community, I can learn more about warrior surrender. I hope I can hang tight to the “most

fundamental” key, the key to God – prayer – and wrestle with God, through my own self-will, more fully into his will. It is my firm belief that, in giving up certain things that now appear to be the very fabric of myself, I will be led deeper into “myself-in-God”, to places I have yet to explore. Certainly, no environment guarantees success, but, as WGA has been a community around me to help me in one phase of my walk with God, I hope my next community will also aid my journey.

### **Skills – learning about them and learning them**

My priest, Father Joseph, made a comment to me that struck a note of truth. He said, “You know too much and you are profoundly a neophyte.” I think he’s right. I recently read a quote by Eddie Starnater, an outdoor survival instructor, that added to the meaning of Father Joseph’s words. Eddie comments, “The time we spend actually learning the skill, as opposed to learning about the skill, is what I like to think of as working in Earthtime.” Well, I know a lot about walking with God. I have studied and examined the “skills” involved for many years. But I believe Father Joseph is right, that I am “profoundly a neophyte” in actually learning many of the skills of deeply relating to God. It is my desire that this next step of my life on earth will help me work more in “Earthtime.”

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*(Keys... continued from page 6)*

Rather, more accurately, more in “God time.” God helping me, so be it!

### **Connection - mailing address**

OK. Back to earth. The Where Grace Abounds office has a mailing address for me. I can be contacted by snail mail, for those of you that still remember how to do that! I have not been known in the past for my great gift at mail correspondence, but who knows? It might happen!

### **Connection - confession as living in reality**

And now for some personal honesty. I want to thank all of you who have known me, loved me, walked and prayed with me. Some of you know how focused (fanatic?) I can be when I am hot on the trail of a new

facet of truth in my life. Well, my pursuit of the particular areas of truth that monastic life highlights is no exception. My strength of focus is also my weakness. As I burn with zeal to pursue this next leg of my journey in my pursuit of God, like a car’s exhaust, the after-burn stinks of pride in my zeal and self-elevation because I am so zealous. I confess to God that all I have to offer him, minus his spirit in me, is pride in myself and contempt for others. But truly, what do I know of someone else’s heart? Please forgive me, and pray for me. I look forward to the day when who I am is, truly, Christ living in me, and you. God help us all see the image of God in each other and God bless us, every one!

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*(Update... continued from page 1)*

before we have any more group meetings here,” say those of us who are considering the aesthetics of our meeting room. Karen’s incredulous question comes to mind, “Why? It doesn’t have any holes in it!” I miss the challenge of her bottom-line priorities.

Karen can’t be replaced. Her personality and set of gifts and abilities, and the way she expressed her relationship with God, are unique and

we grieve the loss of her daily presence with us. But Karen stays in touch, so we haven’t lost her completely! She wrote the following article as an update to all of us and for newsletter readers. We decided to publish the entire letter—can’t know who of our readers might be interested in what part of her life now.

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**JUNE**

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### **Thursday Night Group**

**June 3rd - 49 people**

**June 10th - 57 people**

**June 17th - 47 people**

**June 24th - 47 people**

**Orientation meeting - 9 new people**

### **Discipleship Counseling and Mentoring**

**The WGA staff provided about  
10 hours of discipleship  
counseling and mentoring  
each week last month.**

**June 4th - WGA will be presenting  
at a dinner party hosted by the  
WGA Board of Directors**

**June 11th - WGA is participating in  
the Rocky Mountain Yearly  
Meeting of Friends.**

**June 19th - WGA group picnic**

**June 25-27th - Family & Friends  
Retreat**

## **JULY & BEYOND**

**July 17th - Dinner Party to introduce  
WGA to new people**

**July 18 - 20th - Leaders training days  
at Azusa Pacific**

**July 20-24th - Exodus International  
Conference at Azusa Pacific (Greater  
LA Area)**

**July 25th - Mary Heathman will be  
speaking at a Lutheran Church in the  
LA area**

**July 31st - Sy Rogers will be speaking  
at Cherry Hills Community Church.  
Contact the WGA office if you would  
like more information.**

### **WGA Staff**

**Mary Heathman**  
Executive Director

**Program Department**  
**Scott Kingry**  
Program Director  
**Pat Bott**  
Assistant Program Director

**Operations Department**  
**Roger Jones**  
Operations Director  
**Sheila Knudtsen**  
Resource Development

### **Purpose Statement**

*Where Grace Abounds exists  
to guide and support men  
and women who seek to  
understand sexuality and  
relationship, and to inspire  
all people to know and  
personally appropriate God's  
plan for their sexuality and  
relationships.*



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