

Christmas at Sweet Water Park:

**By**

**Ann Harrison**

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# Dedication

To my readers, without you, there would be no one to meet my characters in my Becca Martin Mystery world. I created this short story just for you.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16, KJV



## Chapter One

Merrie Roundtree gazed out the kitchen window, longing to take a trip with her husband, Joseph. Although they loved to climb the stepping stones with their daughters, she wished they could go alone. A blanket of snow covered her little yard. She glanced over her shoulder as Joseph's boots clattered behind her.

“Merrie dear, why are you staring out the window? I think it's time to put supper on.”

## A Journey of Faith

“Let me fix our plates, the stew’s sitting on the back of the stove.” She dished up the rabbit stew and served it up with large slices of fresh cornbread.

Joseph said a quick prayer of thanksgiving, before taking his first bite of the warm stew. “Now, tell me what you were thinking about as you stared at the snow, my dear.”

“I was thinking that we should take a trip. We haven’t been to the stepping stones since the girls were little.”

“We can’t take the trip in this snow, we’d get stuck.”

“I don’t think so. I feel a tug on my heartstrings to climb those steps again. Besides, we have snow

tires on the truck. I don't mean that we should stay overnight, but I feel led to explore the stones."

"Why don't we invite Martha, Charles and the grandkids to go along?"

"Joe, I know you want to take the kids with us, but we haven't taken a trip by ourselves in such a long time. I think it's time we do something together for a change. You know Martha would agree with me." She gave him a pleading smile.

"Let's pray about it before we make any hasty decisions." He moved his dishes to one side, pulling his coffee cup toward him.

## A Journey of Faith

“You want more stew or cornbread?” Merrirose to refill her coffee cup.

“Not tonight, honey. I just wanted a light supper. I had a big lunch at work. But I will take another cup of coffee.”

After refilling her own cup, Merrie brought the pot to the table. Placing a hand on her husband’s shoulder, she refilled his cup.

“Let’s pray about this trip over coffee. I feel the Holy Spirit calling us up there.” Joseph took a long sip and reached to take his wife’s hand. “Heavenly Father, we come to you in the sweet name of Jesus, to give thanks for the meal we have received and for the snow you have blessed us with. The white blanket covering

the earth looks glorious, and we give you praise for that. Lord, we also come to ask for your wisdom. Merrie says you have called her to take a trip back to Sweet Water Park. If this is your will, please give us traveling mercies as we take our journey. All these things we ask in Your name, Amen.”

The couple held hands and sipped their coffee in silence. An image filled Joseph’s mind as he prayed. People gathered on the climbing paths in skis, for a celebration of some kind.

“Come join the Christmas festivities!” a voice called out to him.

“We’re celebrating the birth of the Christ child. You won’t want to

## A Journey of Faith

miss this!” Another voice responded.

“Take your wife to see the story of my son’s virgin birth.” The silent whisper from the Holy Spirit, deep within his soul made his heart dance, as a smile spread across his face.

*When shall we go, father?*

“You must go at first light tomorrow. For now, rest, my son, for you have a long journey ahead.”

“Merrie, dear, be sure to pack the picnic hamper. We’re making the trip up to Sweet Water Park for the Christmas celebration tomorrow.” He stood and hugged his beloved wife.

“What made you change your mind about going?” Merrie

gathered the supper dishes and turned toward the kitchen.

“The Holy Spirit.” Joseph described the image he saw as tears of joy filled Merrie’s eyes.

“I’ll put the stew away, we’ll take it with us in the morning.” She moved to the kitchen to wash the supper dishes, humming as she went.

## Chapter Two

The next morning, Merrie reheated the leftover stew and poured it into a large thermos. She filled a smaller thermos with fresh coffee. “I feel led to pray before we head out.”

“I agree.” Joseph held her hands as they bowed their heads to pray. “Father, thank you for leading us to Sweet Water Park today. We ask

that you give us traveling mercies and place your protective shield around us and our family. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.”

After a hasty breakfast, the couple donned their winter clothing and made the two-hour trip to Sweet Water Park, singing songs of praise and worship as Joseph drove. When they arrived, a large sign announcing a special Christmas celebration drew their attention.

People cheered as Joseph drove through the main entrance of the park. He found a parking space near Ted Morris's office.

“Welcome to our Sweet Water Park Christmas party!” voices called as the Merrie and Joseph

## A Journey of Faith

Roundtree disembarked from their truck.

“Where should we store our picnic hamper?” Merrie Asked Ted from his office door.

“Let me take that. I’ll put it in my office with Martha’s basket. You folks have time to do some climbing, before the show this afternoon.” Ted strolled into his office and placed the hamper on a long table among other baskets and an array of covered dishes.

“Granny, Granny, Granny!” five-year-old Becca Martin ran across the parking lot and threw herself in Merrie’s arms.

“I didn’t expect to see you here today, munchkin!” Merrie kissed her granddaughter on the cheek and

set her back on her feet. “Martha, where’s Jo?” she asked as her daughter gave her a welcoming hug.

“She couldn’t come today, she had to work at the diner. She said she’d be up here before the show closed on Sunday. Charles and I are so glad you and Daddy came to celebrate the birth of Jesus!” Martha hugged her father and walking over to stand beside her husband.

“Come on, Granny and Papa, Let’s go climbing while we still have time!” Becca pulled Joseph by the hand. “We’re climbing over there!” She pointed to the rock beside the stepping stones.

“You can’t go climbing alone, Becca.” Martha unfolded a

## A Journey of Faith

collapsible stroller and placed her youngest daughter inside. “Charles, don’t let her climb by herself!” She gave her husband a pleading look.

“I’ll go with Becca, so I can keep an eye on her and Merrie. Joseph took Becca’s hand and followed his wife to the stepping stones.

“I’ll be right beside you, dears.” Merrie took her first tentative step onto the stones.

“You be careful up there. You hear?” Joseph’s heart knocked against his ribs, and his stomach lurched as he watched his wife clamber up the snow-laden steps.

“I’ll be fine! You be careful climbing with our grandbaby. She can be pretty rambunctious!” Merry

turned and gave her husband a sweet smile.

“Come on, Papa Joe, let’s go!” Becca tugged on Joseph’s hand to get his attention.

“All right, I’m coming!” He stepped out onto the rock, keeping one eye on Becca and the other on his wife. *Lord, don’t let anything happen to my girl up there, she’s my pride and joy! Protect her while she’s climbing those slippery steps.* Joseph guided Becca to the top of the rockface. At the top of the path, he froze as a crowd gathered behind Mary. “Girls stay behind me!”

“I’ve got Becca.” Charles stepped up beside Joseph and took Becca’s hand, while Martha followed with Amanda in her

## A Journey of Faith

stroller. “Come on, let’s go back down and find seats for the show, while

Papa Joe waits for Granny.”

“Okay, Daddy. We’ll see you at the show, Papa Joe!” Becca waved as she skipped along side her father.

Joseph’s knees trembled as he scanned the thickening crowd.

*Lord, where’s Mary? I can’t see her!* His pulse jumped, as a voice called: “Merrie? Merrie, look out!”

Another voice from further down the stairs shouted: “Someone get Ted, there’s been an accident!”

Chapter Three

“Does anybody know what happened?” Ted shoved his way through the crowd to find Joseph standing at the foot of the stepping stones.

“All I know is that the lady took a tumble off the top step!” a boy of about twelve trembled as he stood on the rock path beside the steps.

“Don’t worry son, we’ll get to the bottom of this. You haven’t

## A Journey of Faith

done anything wrong.” Ted placed a hand on the boy’s shoulder as tears streamed down his cheeks.

“I couldn’t save her. I told her to look out, but I was too far down the stairs!” The boy hung his head as tears spilled onto his sweat-shirt.

“It’s all right, son.” The park owner placed an arm around the child’s shaking shoulders.

“Timmy, come over here and sit with me.” A woman in her mid-thirties stepped over and took the boy’s hand. “Let’s let this kind young man get back to his work.”

“Thanks, Hellen, but I needed him to tell me what he saw.”

“That’s all right, he’s a good boy.” The woman wrapped her

arms around her son and led him away.

“Mr. Morris, I saw Merrie slip off the top step.” A girl of about seventeen came to Ted’s side as the boy and his mother disappeared into the crowd.

“How’d it happen?”

“Well, you see, the snow is thicker over there.” She pointed to the top step. “And Mrs. Roundtree was standing up there, trying to get a bird’s eye view of the park. Apparently, her foot slipped on the ice, and she couldn’t get her balance. I tried to catch her, but she slipped out of my grasp.” Tears slid down the girl’s cheeks as she spoke.

“Do you know of anyone who can back up your story?” Ted

## A Journey of Faith

scanned the sea of faces in search of a friend or family member to help the young girl.

“I can,” cried the girl’s twin sister. “I watched as Traci tried to save Mrs. Roundtree. She’s a real sweet lady, and we wouldn’t want anything to happen to either her or Mr. Joseph.” The girls moved away from the crowd and huddled together.

“Thanks, girls. You may go back to your seats now.” Ted stood rooted to the spot as tears filled his own eyes. *Lord, tell Merrie we love her.*

“Fear not, for I am with you always.” The silent whisper filled his heart with peace, as he went to search the steps for other wayward climbers.

Ann Harrison  
19

## Chapter Four

Joseph ran down the rock, past the milling crowd as the eye witness accounts echoed in his mind. When he reached Ted's office, he fell to his knees, as tears clouded his vision. *Oh, God, what happened to my sweet Merrie? How could you take her away from me? What have I done to deserve such punishment?*

“Joseph! Joseph, get up off the floor and look at me!” A familiar voice shook him from his reverie.

“I want my Merrie!” He wiped his eyes and nose with his jacket sleeve.

“If you don’t get off that floor and look at me, I’ll have to ask the Lord to talk some sense into you.” The reprimand was followed by a tap on his shoulder. “Look behind you, you silly, silly man!”

“I’m a broken-hearted fool!” He rose and glanced over his shoulder. He fell onto the stool, which served as his altar moments before. He stared in awe, as his beloved Merrie materialized before him, wearing a white robe and a halo, shining with a heavenly light. “But I thought I’d

## A Journey of Faith

lost you! Someone said there'd been an accident on the stepping stones!" He wiped his eyes with his jacket sleeve again.

"Shh!" The angelic form of Merrie placed a hand over his lips. "My Earthly body lies in the snowdrift behind the stones, but I am a new creature, now that I've soared to my heavenly home."

"But how did you get here?" His eyes widened as he stared at her dazzling halo.

"You needed me, that's why I stand before you now. The Lord asked me to give you a message."

"What's that?"

"You are never alone, and you'll see me before you know it.

Now, go out and celebrate the birth of our Lord and Savior, while Ted and his staff see to my body. There will be an announcement at the show today, so have a bit of stew, before it gets cold.”

“My sweet Merrie, always the caretaker.”

“If I don’t care for you, who will.” She handed him a bowl of stew and he savored every bite while praising the Lord for these precious moments with her. Tears filled his eyes once more.

“Now listen here! I’ll have none of that. You must celebrate my life, not mourn my death, for I am with Jesus.” She kissed him on the cheek, before kneeling at his

## A Journey of Faith

feet once more. “I must leave you now. I have a little boy to comfort but remember I’ll be there when you need me. Goodbye, my love, until we meet again.”

The robed figure disappeared as Ted walked through the door.

“Oh, Joe, I’m so sorry. I have some terrible news for you.” Tears filled his eyes as he sat in his desk chair.

“You found Merrie’s crumpled body in the snowdrift behind the stepping stones, right?” Joseph packed up the hamper and placed it beside his stool.

“How did you know?”

“I can’t explain it, but the Lord told me.” He walked around the large oak desk and stood beside his long-time friend. “She’s in a better place now. She

would want us to celebrate her life, not mourn her death.”

“Yeah, but she was a good friend.” Ted produced a handkerchief from his pocket and wept into it.

“We’re not alone, Ted. God is with us!” Joseph patted the park owner’s shoulder.

“We can’t go on with the celebration of Jesus’s birth after such a tragedy.”

“Yes, we can, and we must!”

“But how, after such a horrific accident?” Ted wiped his eyes one last time, before shoving the handkerchief back in his pocket.

“I’ll tell you how. We celebrate the birth of Jesus, then we announce that one of our own walks with Him today.”

26

## A Journey of Faith

“You’re right, I’ll go tell our actors to get set up. The show must go on.”

Chapter Five

The show took place as scheduled, with a special ceremony at the end. Ted stood in the center of the room as the actors took a final bow. “I have a special announcement to make. One of our own is walking with Jesus as we speak.” He Shared the news of Merrie’s accident on the stepping stones. The murmur of voices faded into silence in response to Ted’s news.

## A Journey of Faith

“How can you celebrate life after such a horrific tragedy?” a voice called from the back of the small amphitheater.

“Merrie wouldn’t want us to mourn her death. Even though she had a lot of health problems in the past couple of years, she was always a happy person, no matter how much pain she suffered. She ain’t suffering anymore. Like Ted told you, she’s in heaven with Jesus now.” Joseph turned to find the person who’d posed the question.

“You’re right Mr. Joe! Merrie would want to be remembered for spreading joy everywhere she went!” Twelve-year-old Timmy Johnson jumped from his seat and

ran to give the older man a warm hug.

“Come again, son?” Joseph looked down at the smiling face of the young boy with tears in his eyes.

“She came to me for a brief moment! I didn’t make her fall, nobody did! But you know what?”

“What’s that?” Joseph laid a hand on Timmy’s shoulder.

“She’s free to be with Jesus! She’ll turn up in the least expected places when someone’s in trouble.”

Cries of “Amen!” rippled through the room.

“Remember, folks, you’re never alone. The Lord is with you always. I will go where He sends me in time of need. Go home and celebrate the Christmas season

## A Journey of Faith

with your families, for Jesus is the reason for the season!” A familiar voice caused the crowd to gasp as one. As the words of wisdom faded away, the crowd cheered and music filled the air.

“Let’s go celebrate the reason for the season!” came a shout from the back of the amphitheater. The crowd dispersed into a mix of joyful conversations.

Chapter Six

As Joseph prepared to leave, Ted motioned him into his office. “I’ve made special arrangements to have a memorial service for Merrie after the show closes on Sunday. I’ll leave you in charge of making the funeral arrangements.”

“I’ll take care of that first thing in the morning. I think I’ll wait until after Christmas to have the funeral service, though.”

## A Journey of Faith

“Why is that?”

“We have a celebration to plan, and I’m going to decorate my little cabin, just the way she’d want me too.”

“Sounds good.” Ted clapped Joseph on the back. “Well, old pal, I’ll see you around.”

Joseph bid his long-time friend a good night. He retrieved Merrie’s hamper and sauntered out to his old truck. *Lord, thank you for allowing me to see Merrie one more time, before taking her home. I thank you for not taking her away from me. You tell us in your Word that you have plans for us. Well, Lord, let me reassure you, I believe that now!* He prayed as he drove to his cabin on top of the mountain known as Roundtree Road.

“Where do you think you’re going, Joseph?” The question made him jump.

“Merrie, are you still here?”

“Of course, because you’re still a broken-hearted fool. Your words, not mine.”

“What do I need to do? I’m going home to decorate the cabin the way you always wanted me to.”

“The cabin can wait. You need to go to Martha’s ranch and spend Christmas with Charles, the kids and her. Christmas is a time to be with the ones you love, not cooped up alone in a mountaintop cabin.”

“Yes, Merrie, I’ll go to the ranch.”

## A Journey of Faith

“That’s a good boy. Those kids need you right now. Don’t forget, Joanne will be there too.”

“You’re right.” He drove toward the Martin ranch a mile from Roundtree road, on the outskirts of Charity Falls, to join his family’s Christmas celebration. The days ahead would be the hardest in his life, but he didn’t have to face them alone. One day he would see Merrie again in Heaven. He promised to live his life on earth according to God’s will, until Jesus called him to his heavenly home.

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## About the Author

Ann Harrison is the author of *The Spirit of Creativity: Inspirational Poems for the Creative at Heart*. Three of her previously published books are in the process of being revised and rebranded. She has also been published in several anthologies, including a devotional entitled *God Things: Hope for the Hurting*, alongside Jen Lowry and fifteen other authors. Aside from her work as a Christian fiction author, Ann is a professional freelance writer and

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38

## A Journey of Faith

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