

The Light
from a
Thousand
Wounds

A Mother's Memoir of Finding
Beauty in Life's Darkest Moments



COREY HATFIELD



The names and identifying characteristics of some persons referenced in this book have been changed to protect their privacy.

Published by River Grove Books
Austin, TX
www.rivergrovebooks.com

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Distributed by River Grove Books

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Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication data is available.

Print ISBN: 978-1-63299-925-2

eBook ISBN: 978-1-63299-926-9

First Edition

Light-Bearing

How then does light return to the world after the eclipse
of the sun? Miraculously. Frailly. In thin stripes.

—VIRGINIA WOOLF, *The Waves*

The storm has passed. I open Grayson's battered door and crawl to him on hands and knees. I have been to the precipice, but his tears of humanity call me back, melting both his rage and mine. Through his tears, I catch a glimpse into his tormented soul and am crushed beneath my woeful lack of love. My smallness of heart grieves me to no end, and my inability to contain both his light and his pain is the true origin of my darkness.

I have been deemed worthy of caring for an angel, yet I continuously proclaim, "I cannot."

I collapse before him in an unworthy heap of remorse and offer him a glimpse into my tormented soul. Forgetting his pain, he weeps for mine, and as he tenderly strokes my hair, his tears wash me with divine forgiveness. He loves me in a way I don't deserve to be loved.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, is called the Light Bearer. She knit flaming

cells of light within her womb, but like the burning bush, she was not consumed. She carried light and became light. Yet when I try to do the same, I groan and stagger beneath its weight. My soul-womb is not yet spacious enough to bear my son's light.

But he has been expanding me since the day of his conception. His limbs of light extend into my dark places time and again. They ground me in hope and joy and laughter, and in his eyes, the veil is thin, and I can almost see straight into Heaven.

Just as black is not the absence of color but the union of all, so is Grayson not an absence but a brimming fullness. The complete embodiment of all things—all joy and sorrow, all blessings and pain. The universe is contained within him, and I am being widened to contain them both.

A friend once asked, "How can you love him when he causes so much pain?" I answered truthfully, "While Grayson has been at the center of so many challenges, I've never once viewed him as the source of my pain. I am who I am because of him."

I've written much on the pain and sorrow and would be gravely remiss to overlook the blessings and joy.



Whatever Grayson gives, he does so wholeheartedly, without expecting anything in return—like the morning he woke me up early, bursting at the seams to celebrate *his* birthday. A cup of coffee, a spoon, and some creamer lay on the table next to my reading chair, alongside my journal and pen and a heartfelt note he'd dictated on his iPad: *I love you mommy I think about you in my heart so does god and Jesus if I could I would give you a piece of my heart god and me thank you for being my mom sorry you didn't sleep well god prays for you every night and day.*

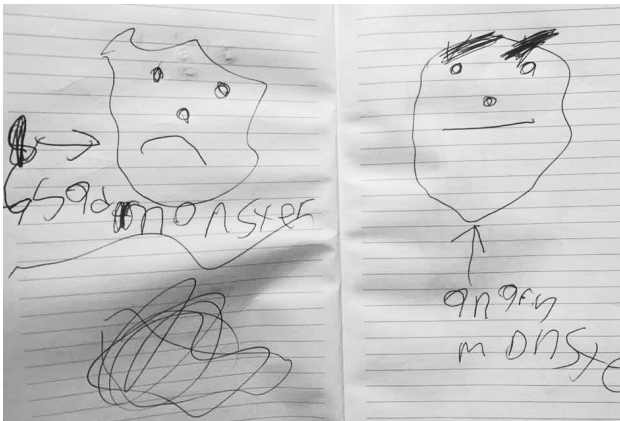
His theology is better than most.

I delight in his notes. I savor and study them, especially the handwritten ones. All his eclectic parts collide in a hot, jumbled mess and are captured and preserved on a whole sheet of paper. I notice the nuances no one else would and laugh to myself. That hole is where he drooled. I

picture him growing irritated and feverishly scrubbing the wet spot until the paper dissolved beneath his finger. The scribble blacker than night is where he wrongly formed a letter and buried it alive beneath a pile of ink—pen clutched in his seething fist. The ballpoint dots that nearly pierced the paper’s skin suggest a serial stabbing and are one of the primary reasons my wood tables are covered in glass. I imagine the heap of crumpled paper snowballs thrown carelessly over his shoulder—prior mistakes cast angrily to the ground. Where others may see only 8.5 × 11 lined sheets of disaster, I see tremendous sacrifices of love.

Such notes epitomize his life. They condense the vastness of his struggles on a singular sheet. No matter his age, on paper he appears perpetually four. Large, misshapen letters clutter the page, and he can only fit several words before running out of space. Every line slopes sharply downward as if by each end, his arm had wearied of writing, and words trail off the paper’s edge, resuming wherever they left off on the next line.

His drawings are even more rudimentary. When I once let him borrow my journal, he returned it with an entry of his own. A bodiless head that could have been drawn by my three-year-old niece had two dots for eyes and one for a nose. An upside-down U formed a mouth, and beneath were the words *sad monster*, as spelled out letter by letter by me. The next page contained the same head but jagged black eyebrows and a straight-lined mouth. That one was captioned *angry monster*.



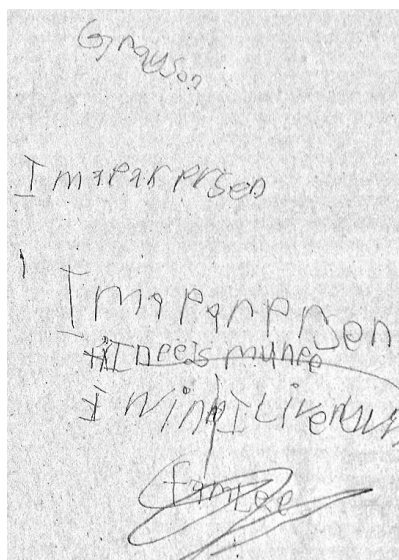
Grayson's sad and angry monsters

On one level, his simplistic drawings are endearing. On another, their insights shatter my soul.

His notes are compilations of recycled phrases; Grayson collects sayings like others collect stamps or coins. “You rock” was one of Mr. Roth’s favorite phrases and, therefore, a frequent greeting in Grayson’s letters. Another expression originated with Grayson. It popped out of his mouth when he could barely speak, and he’s said it every night since: “I think about you in my heart, Mom. I think about you in my peace.”

I’m not exactly sure what he means by this, but I like the idea of being thought about in someone’s peace.

I find many of his letters humorous, especially when angrily written. One such note was written on a paper towel and conspicuously left on the counter after dinner: *I love you mom love Grayson your food was grose I just ate it to make you happy.* Another, found when he was eight years old, had been written on a piece of cardboard after packing his suitcase: *Imaparprsen Ineedsmunee Iwintlivewmuhfamlee*, which translated to *I’m a poor person. I need money. I won’t live with my family.* His name is signed at the top because he ran out of room at the bottom. Apparently, he had big plans to run away from home and panhandle for a living.

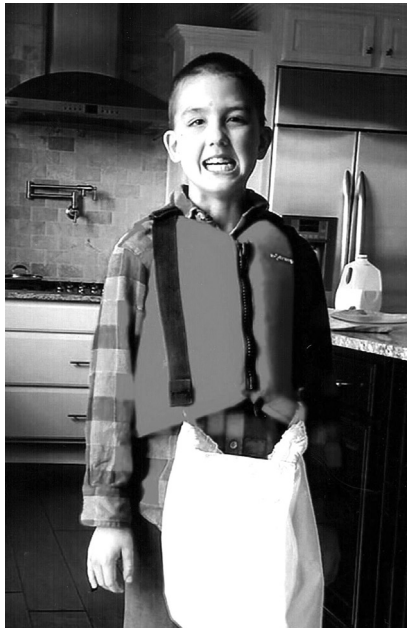


Grayson’s note: “I’m a poor person. I need money. I won’t live with my family.”

While his letters provided helpful insight into his brain, Grayson's crazy stunts were more amusing than anything. He became obsessed with feeling weightless, and all his quirky infatuations—like water slides, roller coasters, and marble ramps—partially satiated this sensation. But right around the summer of 2014, Grayson added a few new activities that could lend to the feeling of buoyancy, like levitation, sky diving, and scuba diving—and he dubbed me his lucky assistant.

Every day, a fresh idea led to unique props and relatively appropriate costumes. One morning, he came downstairs dressed in a life vest with a garbage bag tied to the front and declared it “Skydiving Day.” He traipsed to the park, leaped from the jungle gym, and grew enraged when his parachute failed to slow his landing.

On “Scuba Diving Day,” he came down wearing Jacob's tight-fitting long underwear as a wetsuit, with two grocery bags taped around his feet to keep them dry. Why dry feet were so important I'll never know. I trailed behind him to the neighborhood lake and then dealt with his fit when he discovered his wetsuit and “boots” were insufficiently waterproof. But his



Grayson's “skydiving” outfit

tantrum came to a screeching halt in a brilliant flash of inspiration. To be a *real* scuba diver, he needed to breathe underwater. Could I just run back home and grab him a straw?

His fascination with levitation lasted the longest. He watched one YouTube video after another, studying the exact placement of a plank between two chairs. Grayson squealed with excitement when the magician removed the board, and the volunteer's body remained hovering in midair. Our living room became his stage, with a thin sheet of plywood connecting two chairs. He repeatedly ordered any compliant person to yank the board from beneath him to test whether he could float. His siblings were exceedingly happy to oblige him and watched him tumble to the ground again and again—laughing each time harder than the last. Grayson would jump up, muttering and shaking his head in disgust, and then dust himself off as he set out to find a new-and-improved method.

When, at last, we helped him understand there was a trick behind every levitation, he reluctantly settled for the mere illusion.

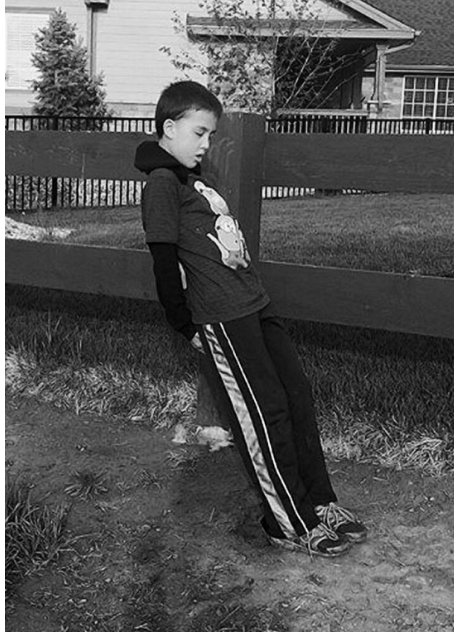
One summer morning, Grayson dragged me outside when there was barely enough light to see. A YouTube video had provided the key to his success. He instructed me to bury the head of a shovel and pack the surrounding dirt *tight!* Then, planting his feet on the shovel head, he leaned back on the wooden handle concealed by his shirt, and let his head fall forward, closing his eyes as if under a spell. I snapped many photographs to prove the authenticity of his illusion. The shovel stayed buried all summer, and I often caught him talking to his imaginary audience while “levitating” on its wooden handle.

His most serious weightless attempt came in the form of a red balloon. While cleaning, I lost track of Grayson. Suddenly, I heard the garage door creak, followed by Jacob's hesitant voice. I could tell he was trying to suppress a laugh, and nothing about the situation sounded promising.

“Um, Mom,” he called. “You'd better come see what Grayson did.”

More muffled giggles.

Knowing that whatever awaited me in the garage could not be good, I dropped my dish towel and responded promptly. Before I even rounded the corner, I saw the red glow. A giant, rubbery red balloon was filling



Grayson “levitating” on a shovel

my garage—its string wrapped around the handlebars of Grayson’s bike. Flabbergasted, I paused while piecing together the story in my mind. Knowing it would take something massive to lift his body into the air, Grayson snuck away when I wasn’t looking—a pair of scissors tucked in his pocket—and rode his bike to the neighborhood model homes, where he snipped the string of the largest balloon he’d ever beheld in his life. It occurred to me then that he had ridden through our entire neighborhood dragging a bobbing model-home balloon behind him. Although my jaw was on the floor, I had the presence of mind to snap a picture, and the second I did, the balloon drifted toward the top of the garage, hit something sharp, and popped. All hell broke loose, followed by a massive fit and concurrent apologies to the model-home salespeople.

They hadn’t even realized their balloon was missing.

More than half of our adventures ended in Category 5 meltdowns. Still, I found myself doing my son’s crazy bidding: I tracked down magnifying plexiglass, rescued plastic pipes from dumpsters, and searched the internet

for the coveted infomercial “Ostrich Pillow”—all while wondering: *What in tarnation am I doing?*

Honest to goodness, I have stood outside in the heat of summer before God and all our neighbors, attaching branches to my son with a belt as he pressed himself against a tree trunk to test whether he could successfully disappear. I have rolled and bound him with plastic wrap and packing tape just to see if he could roll faster down hills, and I have stuffed sweatpants full of T-shirts and arranged them with shoes on a chair so Grayson could lie on the floor, his legs hiding behind the couch—thereby creating the illusion of being sawn in two.

His wacky ideas drive me half mad. My other half is thoroughly entertained.

But most hilarious of all is Grayson’s YouTube history, which I’ve often reviewed with tears streaming down my cheeks. His sought-out topics have included *how to make a shocking spy device*, *how to walk through a closed*



Grayson trying to disappear via camouflage

door, how to do freaky body tricks, how to charge your iPod with a sock, how to make string go through your head, how to shock yourself, how to break your arm in three seconds, and my personal but totally random favorite, Kevin Hart women anger issues.



Grayson's zest for life is like a blinding ray of sunlight—intense and impossible to ignore. If he is elated, rest assured, the world will know. But the joy he bestows is subtle, like floating particles of dust drifting on slanting shafts of light. Some will be repulsed, beholding only sloughed-off flakes of dead skin. But others with the eyes to see will be enchanted by the sparkling glitter dancing in the sun.

Much of life with Grayson has been loud and turbulent. The lows have been extremely low, and the peaks more like barely perceptible hills. Our victories have been measured in slivers—an intentional smile, sitting still in the dentist's chair, not leaping from a moving vehicle—events that most parents take for granted. Such gifts occur in the cracks of time, the in-between moments, and when I forget to pay attention, they slip by—uncelebrated and unnoticed.

The joy that comes from being Grayson's mother trickles in through holy streams of effervescent laughter. It hovers in silent, marveling wonder and sneaks in unannounced when I come to my senses and find myself knee-deep in his outlandish schemes. Being his mother has peeled my fingers from any semblance of perceived control. He has made me belly-laugh and blubber like a baby; he has humbled me and made me so proud I could burst. Above all, he reminds me daily, in the words attributed to Mother Teresa, that "I can do no great things—only small things with great love."

I once read that the difference between a fly and a bee is that a fly will be drawn to the single pile of dung amid a field of wildflowers, whereas a bee will seek the lone flower in a landfill. Day by day, I am striving to be like the bee, though I fail more often than not. I am fighting to cling to the good

and let the rest slide. I am attempting to grow still and widen my eyes to the in-between moments, the cracks, and the fragile slivers of time.

In the rare moments when my insides stop churning, I lie fallow and watch sparkles of dust dance across sunbeams. I bathe in their light, and the rays reach deep into my darkness and ground me in a calm, quiet joy.

About the Author



COREY HATFIELD was born and raised in Colorado. She and her college sweetheart, Arin, have been married for twenty-five years and are the proud parents of five grown children, one of whom is autistic. Through many turbulent, overwhelming years of parenting, Corey encountered beauty to be the great healer of trauma and now feels passionate about sharing her journey with fellow strugglers. Rather than viewing suffering as a curse, she believes it to be a gift, capable of opening humanity to deeper levels of healing and growth. She and her husband now live on eighty peaceful acres in the Wet Mountains of southwestern Colorado.

The Light from a Thousand Wounds is Corey's debut memoir. Readers can connect with her at www.coreyhatfield.com.