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A Newsletter of the Amy Foundation



Since 9/11

By Sharon Siepel

"We're going on a real airplane," squealed my two girls as they tried to buckle their seat belts, lower their tray tables, and look out on the tarmac all at once. Giddiness mixed with the fear of the unknown played over their eyes.

"Is this thing really going to blast-off?" asked one. Wanting to reassure them, I asked the flight attendant if they could visit the cockpit and meet the pilot.

"Oh, we don't do that any more—not since 9/11," she replied. It was to become the mantra of our family vacation.

We landed in Denver, home of three of my siblings. The last time we had visited we had one child; now we had four. Since early spring I had looked forward to this reunion: hugs of greeting upon leaving the plane, exuberant greetings all lived in my memory from the last time we visited.

We entered the emotionless, stark, stainless steel terminal. Strangers, refusing to make eye contact, shoved past. This is how my children would remember the airport. I mentioned the difference to my husband. "Well, you know, since 9/11. . ."

"Let's visit the Air Force Academy," I suggested one morning. My sister's face turned down.

"Can't really see much anymore. Most of the campus has been locked down since 9/11."

"Okay, then let's go to the U.S. Mint," I said. My sister just stared at me. "Don't tell me you can't tour there either."

"No, they still have tours. It is just that you need to make reservations three to four weeks in advance," she said.

"When did they start doing that?" I asked, even though I could guess the answer.

"Since 9/11."

Some people say that the United States entered the War on Terror for power, ego or oil. Have we forgotten some of the simple freedoms that we used to enjoy before that terrible day, September 11, 2001? Do we, as citizens of the United States, truly understand what our lives will look like if we do not conquer the evil that desires to eliminate all of our freedom?

At one Colorado tourist attraction we were able to visit, we were poignantly reminded that some are willing to risk their lives to ensure that terror never strikes our homeland again and our freedoms are not diminished further.

From pine branches and fence rails at the Flying W

Prayer Requests

We believe that "The prayers of the righteous availeth much." We invite you to pray with us about various aspects of The Amy Foundation Ministry.

Please join us in asking for God's direction and for the leading of the Holy Spirit as we work to help Christians obey Christ's mandate to make disciples by teaching obedience of all His commandments.

Amy Prayer List:

- Amy Writing Awards — increased number of submissions in 2006.
- Christian writers mobilized and equipped to use their skills in obedience to Christ's call to make disciples.
- Amy Internet Syndicate—new writers for columns and for God to open the hearts of editors to use the columns.

Sharon Siepel is a freelance writer living in Ohio. This personal narrative of a family experience first appeared as a letter to the editor in the Community Press North Clermont on August 4, 2004. It was reprinted by CBN.com in a September 2006 commemoration of the 5th anniversary of 9/11.

Continued, page 3 **k**

Writing from life experiences

by Sharon Siepel

Shortly after watching a certain animated film in which one of the main characters (a fish) often forgot where she was, I found my four-year-old daughter using our living room couch as a trampoline.

"Honey, don't jump on the couch," I said, as only a mother of four can.

She stopped. "Okay, Mom."

But as I turned to walk out of the room the bouncing resumed. Pivoting on one heel, I scolded, "I told you not to jump on the furniture."

"Sorry Mom. I suffer from short-term memory loss."

And some say media doesn't influence our children.

As the above example demonstrates, telling a personal anecdote can be an effective way to convey a universal truth. Narrative stories draw people into your article. Once readers invest time into reading two or three paragraphs, they will likely read it to the end.

Readers identify and empathize with the writer when an author dares to share a piece of his life with the world. This emotion sways the reader to be more sympathetic to the writer's cause.

In order for personal anecdotes to work there are some basic guidelines to follow:

1. Keep it real.

Readers know when you make something up. Your story needs to be from your own experience or the experience of someone you are close to.

2. Keep it specific

Details create a picture.

"I found my four year old daughter using our living room couch as a trampoline" creates the setting much better than "I found a girl

jumping on a piece of furniture."

3. Keep it universal.

Know your audience and speak to something they understand. If a surgeon shares a very technical story complete with medical jargon to a non-medical audience, the doctor will lose his readers in the first sentence. While the story is your own, you want to make sure your audience can relate.

4. Keep it relevant.

Stories of life struggles (death, dying, relationships, and family) stay relevant over time. Sharing about your sister's death, even if it happened twenty-five years ago, still impacts your audience.

However, the effect of stories using current events or popular culture tends to diminish over time. The humor in the example story above had a lot more punch three

years ago right after the movie *Finding Nemo* was released. When using situations that change, timing is everything.

5. Keep it emotional.

Emotions like humor, grief, shock, dismay and gratitude tug at the reader's heart. They couldn't care less if you write:

"I stood in line at the grocery store today."

However, your reader can't help but become emotionally involved when you share:

"Why is it that I always pick the slowest check out line? My getting in line guarantees that the person in front of me will need a price check. However, my lack of line-assessment skills turned into a blessing today..."

Relating a small piece of your life can impact your reader in powerful ways. Use the experiences God gives you to share His truth. |

Winning Strategies

For writing for the secular media

- If you have integrity and live uprightly in your own life and genuinely love, pray for, and try to relate to unbelievers, they will be willing to listen to what you say (and write); but you must make your case in the area of common grace. The unnatural man or woman will not listen to biblical pronouncement alone and be persuaded of God's truth, but the wonderful fact is that God's principles work where man's have failed.
- Appeal to the common sense of the reader.
- Edit and rewrite your material until it is so cleverly crafted that they cannot resist.
- Don't preach.

These "Winning Strategies" were offered by former Amy Writing Award Winners.

Pen & Sword

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Discipling efforts are ripples on a pond

Very often we discover that our discipling efforts can reach further than we ever imagined was possible. We recently learned of just such a case.

This past summer, a Lansing pastor read an issue of *Pen & Sword*. One story in particular made an impact. It appealed to him so much that he requested 150 copies of the story. He distributed them to each and every one of his church members. Later, he followed up with a sermon based on the story.

All this started with one author who simply wrote for publication. But his simple act of obedience to Christ's command to "make disciples" traveled far beyond its original au-

dience and reached far more individuals than he might ever have imagined.

Remember this story next time you wonder if it's worth the time and effort to craft a discipling letter or opinion piece addressing a current event in your local community. God might use your simple obedience to carry his truth far beyond the boundaries of your community.

Your job is to prayerfully—and skillfully—toss the pebble into the pond. Leave the "ripple" production up to God!

Thanks to James Jackson, Amy Syn-
dicate author and Advisory Board member, for sharing this story.

Tell us a discipling story

Do you have an interesting discipling story to tell?

Send a vignette (200-400 words) about a situation or interaction that led to your discipling another person—or group of people—in an unusual or unexpected way. How was God faithful in helping, supporting, reinforcing or extending your obedient actions?

Send stories to the *Pen & Sword* Editors, Amy Foundation, P.O. Box 16901, Lansing, MI 48901; or email AMYFOUNDTN@aol.com.

Since 9/11

Continued from page 1

Ranch in Colorado Springs hang hundreds of yellow streamers. Family or friends of someone serving in Iraq or Afghanistan have lovingly hung each one. Some bear a personal message; all of them bear a name.

"Is Matt's here?" my thirteen-year-old son asked.

"I don't know if anyone from Clermont County, Ohio, has made it out this far," I answered.

My son gave me that piercing gaze that only a teenager would dare to give. Even though we refer to Matt Maupin on a first name basis, we have never met the young man or his family. Yet Matt is remembered regularly in our prayers.

I walked to the ranch office and asked for a streamer and pen. "*Matt Maupin—captured in Iraq—Batavia, OH,*" I wrote. I handed the ribbon to my son, who found a prominent place to tie it.

"...our military is not warring over politics or for the benefit of our economy. Rather they have placed themselves in harm's way in order to make sure it is freedom, not fear, that reigns over our country."

"This way, they won't miss it," he said.

Every morning the staff of the Flying W Ranch walks through the golden forest of waving names and offers personal prayers for those men and women and their families. They take seriously the scriptural truth that "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" for those brothers in the military who are daily "laying down their lives" for all of us.

It is a task they do not take lightly. And neither should we, for our military is not warring over politics or for the benefit of our economy. Rather they have placed themselves in harm's way in order to make

sure it is freedom, not fear, that reigns over our country.

When did my son start caring so much about those who serve to protect and fight for us? Since the morning he watched more than three thousand fellow citizens die at the hands of terrorists dedicated to destruction—since 9/11. ➤

Attention Writers

Pen & Sword has discontinued the "Roaring Lambs" award. Any qualifying letters, opinion pieces and other journalistic pieces could be submitted for the Amy Writing Awards instead.

Read rules and guidelines online at www.amyfound.org.

Upcoming writing conferences

American Christian Writers

Annual conferences in 24 U.S. cities

Box 110390, Nashville, TN 37222

Contact: 800-21-WRITE

ACWriters@aol.com

ACWriters.com

Coming up:

Oklahoma City, OK

February 23-24-, 2007

Dallas, TX

February 16-17, 2007

Montrose Christian Writers Conference

Each July (2007 dates TBD)

Montrose, Pennsylvania

Contact: 800-598-5030

mbc@montrosebible.org

www.montrosebible.org

City Rescue Mission of Lansing

The City Rescue Mission of Lansing, Michigan, is a Christian, non-denominational organization dedicated to helping the needy and homeless in the Greater Lansing area. Its purpose has not changed since 1911: to meet the physical needs of their guests in order to bring those with spiritual needs to Christ. The Mission feeds, clothes, and shelters city residents in order to share the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Located originally at 611 East Michigan Avenue, just blocks from Michigan's state capitol, the Mission has expanded to include three other buildings along the 600 block of Michigan Avenue. Besides food, clothing and shelter, the ministry now offers a rehabilitation program, transitional housing, and various special programs throughout the year. Among those programs are a

backpack-and-school-supply giveaway, winter coat drive, Christmas gifts for children, and holiday food baskets.

Most recently, the ministry has purchased a former elementary school in south Lansing. This purchase provides the opportunity to meet the increasing need for shelter for the homeless women and children in the Lansing community. In addition to that practical service, it will offer the opportunity to present the Gospel and to mentor and disciple all those who come to the shelter for help.

The ministry is praying that God will "bring the right people at the right time" to help with renovations, for which preparations are already underway. Please join them in prayer regarding skilled labor, materials, and financial support for this new endeavor. They are look-

ing for experienced people to help with the design and construction effort.

The ministry is a faith-based organization and relies on the faithful support of donors like the Amy Foundation.

How you can get involved:

- Financial contributions can be sent to: City Rescue Mission of Lansing, 607 E. Michigan Ave., Lansing, MI 48912.
- If you live in the Lansing area and would like to volunteer, call 517-485-7145.
- If you or your company would like to donate labor or materials for the school renovation project, contact Craig Jansen, Project Manager, by calling 517-327-6127 or emailing cjansen@acd.net.
- To learn more, visit www.lcrm.org.



Submit Today!

15 writers will receive \$34,000 in cash prizes

The Amy Foundation Writing Awards program recognizes writers who skillfully and creatively present the biblical position on issues affecting the world today in a sensitive and thought-provoking manner. Qualifying non-fiction entries must have been published in a mainstream non-religious publication.

Winning entries will be re-published in an annual collection of prize-winning entries.

For rules, sample articles and submission forms, visit www.amyfound.org or call 877-727-4262.



The Amy Foundation
Discipling Our Nation in this Generation

Standing Principle is Good for Success

By James J. Jackson

When I was a child, my parents and my friends' parents went to great lengths to assure that they had more influence upon my life choices than anyone or anything else. Not so today. Nowadays, if a parent posed the age old question to their children, "If all of your friends jumped over a cliff, would you do the same?" they might be surprised to hear the answer: "Yes!"

Children today are constantly bombarded with negative, and often deadly, role models. In order to be accepted, they often will abandon whatever moral compass their parents may have tried to instill in them. How can we expect our kids to grow up to be honorable, up-standing citizens when everything they are taught seems to be 180 degrees out of phase?

Television shows often depict parents as buffoons and idiots. Prison was always something to avoid at all costs, first by avoiding activity that could land one there. Today, many Black teens have been quoted as saying that prison is a rite of passage.

Societal icons in movies, rap and T.V. compete daily (with an alarming amount of success) with parents who try to help their children develop a work ethic and self-restraint. These outside influences teach kids that they can have it all, with little or no effort, without a moral focus, and they should expect no consequences for bad behavior.

Parents have little opportunity to set the tone from clothing to language to interaction with the opposite sex, because today's children are being led by the strongest person or impulse. Clothes are often patterned after prison garb, i.e. no

belt; pants drooping and uncombed hair (belts and combs aren't allowed in jail).

Today, it seems that many people of all ages, but especially children, seem to operate in a pack mentality, whereby the leader with the most influence is more often than not the most dysfunctional of the group. Almost daily we hear of people of weak character being led into crime, drugs, and self-destructive activity.

Gang activity is at an all time high across the nation. Kids join and follow whoever is the dominant personality. Many people in prison are there because they blindly followed another person or group into criminal activity rather than taking a stand and doing what is right. The concept of standing alone on principle seems to be lost.

"Mike" was honorably discharged from the Army but became friends with a group of young men with whom he had little in common beyond a love of rap music. After several weeks of 'hanging out' with his newfound friends, Mike, like his friends, became unmotivated, began using drugs, and slid toward trouble.

One day, someone in the group suggested that they rob

a bank. Although this violated every principle he had been taught, Mike didn't have the nerve to stand up to his friends.

He waited in the getaway car with the driver and ended up going to jail, charged with bank robbery along with his friends. Mike's life was destroyed because of his refusal to consider the consequences of compromising his principles and not standing alone.

Young people have to be taught to stand alone and to avoid people who demonstrate self-defeating behavior. Fill a child's heart with God's love, His music, and, mostly, His written rules for living, and the ways of the world are less likely to get a foothold. Give children core values to guide them in all circumstances.

The Bible includes many stories about people who took a stand on principle. Joshua, when everyone seemed to be moving away from God's laws, stated: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord."

I'd rather take a stand on principle than suffer the consequences of following the crowd.

"Real Answers™" furnished courtesy of The Amy Foundation Internet Syndicate.

James Jackson is a freelance writer, former "Voices" columnist for The Lansing State Journal, and a current columnist for the Valley Christian Chronicle.

This article is an example of the Amy Foundation Syndicate, Real Answers.™ Each month, Real Answers offers several new articles, free of charge, to editors across America. For more information, contact Don Lindman at amyfoundtn@aol.com

Read more at our website at amyfound.org.

Amy Syndicate Update



The Amy Syndicate is catching the attention of editors once again. But we need more editors to take advantage of this service, which provides **high quality columns at no charge.**

Here are three ways in which you can be involved:

1. Let your local newspaper editor know of us and know of your interest in having our columns in your newspaper;
2. Pray for the ministry of the Syndicate; and
3. Check out the website yourself at amy syndicate.org. See what good Christian journalism is like!

Most columns are under 600 words and can serve as a model for your own writing in letters to the editor or in an occasional column for your local paper.

Christians Seek Love, Not Hate

Fifth Prize Award of \$2,000

Excerpt

By Ronald J. Sider

Evangelists have a brief message for Fred Phelps, the famous Kansas pastor who travels around the country with his big sign, "God Hates Fags." Apparently, he plans to visit Philadelphia this week.

We say: "Please stay home."

Phelps' sign and message are flatly unbiblical. God does not hate lesbians and homosexuals. God loves them. Perhaps the most oft-quoted text in the entire Bible makes that perfectly clear: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). God loves the world in all its pain and brokenness.

It is true that the Bible teaches that God's will for sexual intercourse is within a life-long marriage covenant between a man and a woman. But God does not hate those who violate God's standards (95 percent of whom are heterosexuals). God loves us even in our weakness and failure.

Nowhere is that clearer than in the story of Jesus and the woman caught in adultery. The harsh leaders who dragged her to Jesus wanted Jesus to condemn her to death. (That was the prevailing legal punishment.) But Jesus gently loved her, shaming her accusers into guiltily slipping away. Left alone with her, Jesus gently said: "Neither do I condemn you; go now and sin no more" (John 8:11). The moral norm was clear, but Jesus' overflowing love was the central message.

So many contemporary Christians lack Jesus' balance. Rather than shouting the unbiblical, heretical message

that "God hates fags," biblical Christians ought to take the lead in condemning gay-bashing. We ought to be in the forefront of condemning and ending the physical violence that gay Americans still sometimes experience. We ought to lead the insistence that gay partners have the right to choose to inherit each other's property, visit each other in the hospital, etc.

That does not mean that we must or should redefine marriage in public law. Virtually all civilizations for millennia have said marriage is between a man and a woman. There are still good reasons for that. But maintaining and defending that ancient wisdom should go hand in hand with an active love for gays and lesbians.

Interestingly, few evangelicals have done that better than Jerry Falwell's former vice president, Ed Dobson. A headline in *Christianity Today*, evangelicalism's most prestigious magazine, says it all: "Ed Dobson loves homosexuals."

Dobson pastors the largest evangelical congregation in Grand Rapids, Mich. When a grieving mother asked Dobson to visit her son who was dying of AIDS, Dobson and his church cared for him until he died. Then Dobson visited the local AIDS Resource Center, asking how he could help. At first, the director was shocked that the pastor of the largest evangelical church cared about people with AIDS. But Dobson's church

started working closely with people at the center and welcomed them to their church.

Hate letters poured in, warning that the church would be "overrun with homosexuals." Dobson replied the following Sunday in his sermon: "When I die, if someone stands up and says, 'Ed Dobson loved homosexuals,' then I will have accomplished something with my life."

A little later, an astonishing editorial appeared in the local gay and lesbian newsletter. The article acknowledged that Dobson and his congregation considered gay practice to be sinful, but then thanked the church for their love and support.

Sadly, Dobson is right that Christians are "often better at hating than at loving." But the Bible calls us to do just the reverse.

This week, as the gay Equality Forum holds its week of events, most evangelicals want dialogue and love, not attacks and hate. Precisely because we seek to hold fast to all biblical standards, we reject Fred Phelps' hateful slogans.

Ronald J. Sider, Ph.D., is a Professor of Theology, Holistic Ministry and Public Policy and Director of the Sider Center on Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary and President of Evangelicals for Social Action. Sider is publisher of PRISM magazine and a contributing editor of Christianity Today and Sojourners.

Note: The fourth-prize article is entitled "Embryonic Cell Research Harms Life" and was written by Duane Sheppard. It first appeared in The St. Cloud Times; St. Cloud, MN. At the request of the publisher, it will not be reprinted here, but you can read it by requesting a copy of the 2005 Amy Writing Awards booklet. Call (517) 323-6233 to request a copy.

Parable of the Woman who was Taken Hostage

Award of Outstanding Merit
\$1,000

Excerpt

By Frank Miele

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."

With those words from John 8:7, Jesus gave the world – and his followers – a challenge that still leaves even the most judgmental among us tongued-tied and ashamed. O the simplicity of it – the mirror held up to our face so that we can see our true enemy: Not the sin committed by our neighbor, but the sin committed by ourselves.

But this lesson has to be learned over and over again. Jesus used his words to help save the life of "the woman taken in adultery" from the wrath of the God-fearing Hebrew community that wanted to cleanse itself of "impurity" by stoning her to death.

Today, those same words might be used to help save the reputation of "the woman taken hostage" – Ashley Smith, the hero who helped to bring fugitive killer Brian Nichols to justice last March. This remarkable woman, a 26-year-old single mom whose husband had been killed four years earlier in an act of violence, had used a Bible lesson from the best-seller *The Purpose Driven Life* to help bring Nichols to conscience – to help him lift the mirror to his own face so he could see himself as he really was.

And instead of becoming just another statistic as Brian Nichols went on his deadly spree, Smith became something much more, a symbol of divine intervention, a confirmation that God has a purpose for all of us – hard as it is sometimes to see.

But it turns out the story was even more complicated than we knew. It turns out that Ashley Smith wasn't just the instrument of divine grace; she was also the recipient of it. It turns out that a mirror was being held up to Ashley Smith's face, too, and she didn't like what she saw.

Indeed, we find out now that Smith's own life was spinning out of control long before Brian Nichols had forced his way into her apartment that fateful night in March. Smith was in fact an active drug addict, a woman who had been weak and selfish in the years following the murder of her husband, who had flunked out of drug rehab, and who could not even trust herself to raise her own young daughter.

In a new memoir – aptly titled *Unlikely Angel* – Smith reveals for the first time that she did not just share the words of Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Life* with Brian Nichols; she also gave him crystal meth that she kept in her house and had used as recently as the night before. Turns out that she was on the same road of reckless self-destruction as her captor – only traveling at a different speed.

On account of this revelation, there has been a tendency among both skeptics and the faithful to dismiss her claim that God had worked through her to bring Nichols to surrender.

Non-believers scathingly dismiss her as just one more hypocritical Christian who falls short of the glory of God. And pious churchgoers, for their own part, might be tempted to equate her weakness with unworthiness.

The exact opposite, of course, is true. Her weakness is what draws God to her, just

as Jesus went to the blind and lame, the sinners and the publicans.

Ashley Smith had that revelation the night she shared pancakes and meth with a man who was wanted for murder. In fact, she now marks her healing from that day, maybe from the moment when Brian Nichols offered to let her use some of her own crystal meth and she turned it down because she felt the eyes of God on her. She hasn't used it since.

It may be hard for some people to understand, but for those of us who have ever walked a ways down a dark path, consumed with hatred or self-pity perhaps, and then seen the light ahead, and walked toward the light, and been showered with the light, and danced in the light, it is not really too hard.

The old slave-ship captain said it best when he looked back on his life of cruelty and saw how far he had come from what he had been: Amazing grace! How sweet the soundThat saved a wretch like me!I once was lost, but now am found;Was blind, but now I see."

It is easy – too easy, and too tempting – to look over the fence and see how our neighbors come up short. But as long as we are looking at someone else's shortcomings, we are probably blind to our own."He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone..."

Read the entire story at www.amyfound.org.

Frank Miele, managing editor of the *Daily Inter Lake* in Kalispell, MT, is also the co-author of two non-fiction books.

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THE AMY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

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The United States—A Discipled Nation

A Call To The Work of Teaching Obedience:

Discipling Myself

1. I will pray every day for a discipled nation in this generation. I will work with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength in the mission of this grandest of all causes.
2. I will read at least one chapter of God's truth every day and work to apply it in my life.
3. I will take a personal inventory of the blatant and subtle sin in my life that I may instantly know when it occurs and thereby enter into a state of righteousness through confession and repentance.
4. I will develop a forgiving spirit, never permitting pride, selfishness, or vanity to prevent me from being the first to say, "I'm sorry."
5. I will submit to the authority of truth, seeking to be mentored by elders, pastors, or any Christian teaching biblical truth in wisdom and love.
6. I will not be intellectually lazy, but will work to understand the times and know what Christians must do. I will subscribe to challenging publications both secular and Christian.
7. I will continually express my gratitude to my heavenly Father for His goodness and mercy.
8. I will constantly hold before me the biblical truth that the Central Purpose of a Christian life is to be an obedient disciple and to make dis-

ciplines by teaching obedience of all that Jesus commanded us.

9. I will be engaged in prayer through the day and submit to a regular discipline of fasting as the Spirit of the Lord leads me.

*"Your Kingdom Come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is
in heaven."*

—Matthew 6: 10 NIV

The **Discipled Nation Plan** is an effective, easy-to-use tool that is helping individuals and churches focus on the work of making disciples. It starts with discipling one's self, tackles the tough issues of the family, and then initiates discipling activities in our churches and neighborhoods. You can read the entire Discipled Nation Plan at www.amyfound.org

